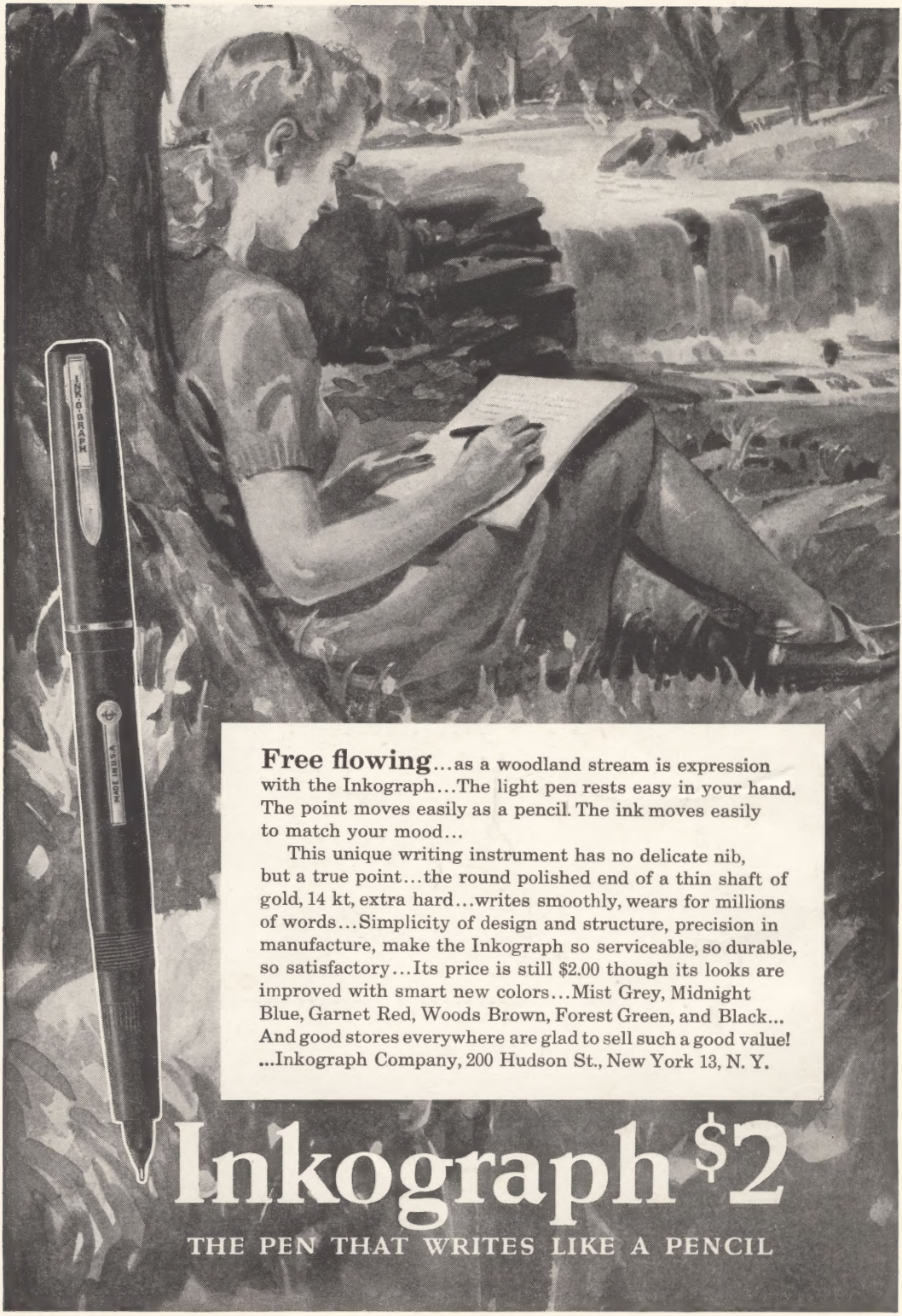
15 CENTS
LOVE
SHORT STORIES
POPULAR PUBLICATIONS
MAY
Double FOR HEARTBREAK
by BLAKE REED



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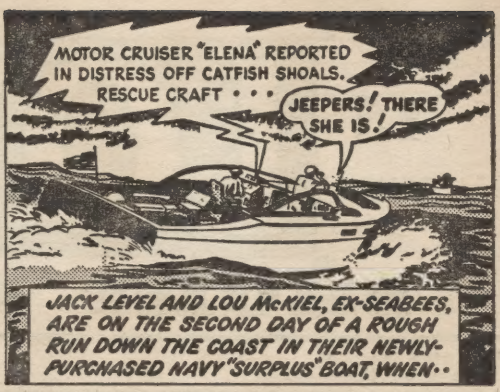
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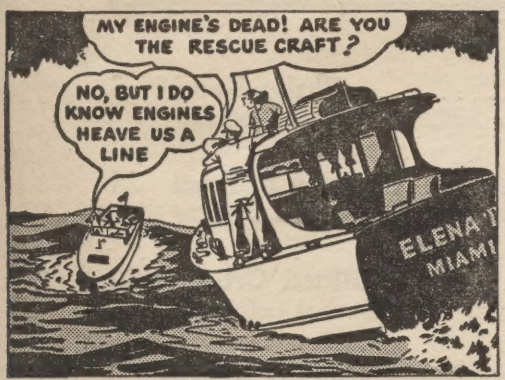
JEEPERS! THERE SHE IS!
JACK LEVEL AND LOU McKIEL, EX-SEABEES, ARE ON THE SECOND DAY OF A ROUGH RUN DOWN THE COAST IN THEIR NEWLY-PURCHASED NAVY "SURPLUS" BOAT, WHEN••



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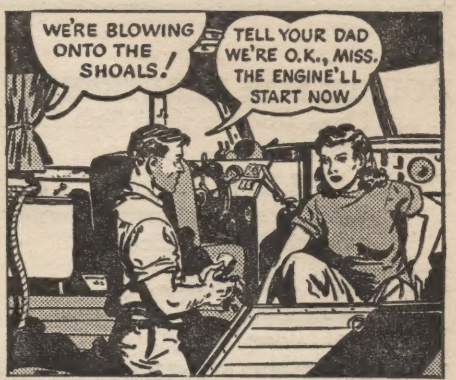

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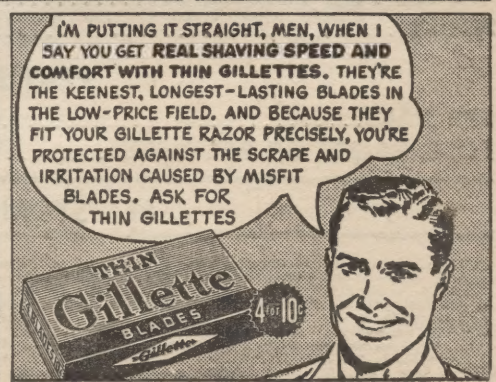
THAT'S A WASTE OF TALENT. MY CONSTRUCTION FIRM NEEDS MEN LIKE YOU
HE'S CERTAINLY HANDSOME


I'M PUTTING IT STRAIGHT, MEN, WHEN I SAY YOU GET REAL SHAVING SPEED AND COMFORT WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY, YOU'RE PROTECTED AGAINST THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
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LOVE SHORT STORIES

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ALL STORIES NEW

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A stranger to her heart!
... but she knew she loved him more than anything else in the world!
The dramatic story of a girl in a man's world who taught a killer the real meaning of love!

JOHN **WAYNE** · GAIL **RUSSELL**

Angel and the BADMAN

with

HARRY **CAREY** · BRUCE **CABOT** · IRENE **RICH** · LEE **DIXON**

STEPHEN GRANT · TOM POWERS · PAUL HURST

Written and Directed by James Edward Grant

A JOHN WAYNE PRODUCTION

A REPUBLIC PICTURE

"Beth, I think you should be the first to know that I've been jilted," Lili said coolly.

By
BLAKE
REED

Beth was determined to save the man she loved from heartbreak—even though it meant she would lose him forever!

IGNORING the storm signals in temperamental Lili Jocelyn's slanting green eyes, Beth Cameron reiterated quietly, "There's no use getting angry, Lili. My mind is made up. I'm quitting!"

The two girls facing each other looked like twins. They had the same ash blonde hair, heavily lashed green eyes, delicate oval faces and full red, enticing mouths.

But the moment Lili Jocelyn spoke, the resemblance ended. Her voice was petulant, her eyes cold and her mouth a twisted, angry line. "What is it that you want Beth?" She laughed nastily. "After all, I can't do much else. As my stand-in, you do everything but breathe for me. You know all my secrets. The studio would be furious if I let you go. It would take months to replace you." She gestured impatiently. "Well, don't stand there looking at me so foolishly. Is it more money?"

"No," Beth replied in an even tone. "I just want to quit and go back East, that's all."

Double For Heartbreak

♥ ♥ ♥

"I don't believe you," Lili snapped. "You've probably had an offer for B pictures from someone who hopes to build you up on the strength of your resemblance to me."

Lili's voice broke with rage. She cried, "You're ungrateful, you—"

"Take it easy," Beth warned. You know what anger does to your throat. I have no intention of going into pictures—as a matter of fact, I'm going back to my old job in New York as a secretary."

When Lili looked incredulous, Beth went on, "I'm tired of all this phony glitter in Hollywood." She paused for a moment. "Besides, you'll be quitting yourself to marry Chan Duryea as soon as you finish this picture. And since there are no more fittings or tough scenes you really don't need me." She broke off suddenly as Lili laughed.

"I have no intention of marrying Chan for a long time, Beth!"

"But your wedding date is set!" Beth gasped. "Chan thinks—"

Lili waved a slim, lovely hand languidly. Chan's engagement ring threw a blinding light into Beth's eyes as Lili mimicked, "Chan thinks—stop worrying about Chan. It was darned good publicity being engaged to the wealthiest bachelor in America. It will be good publicity, too, for months to come. You know, postponed marriage and all that sort of thing."

"But that isn't fair to Chan," Beth protested. Chan was her real reason for wanting to quit as Lili's stand-in. She had not wanted to be here when they married.

Lili was watching Beth critically now. Beth realized suddenly that she had betrayed the secret she had kept so well hidden until now. It would be such a joke to Lili to know that her stand-in who did everything but breathe for her, had fallen in love with her fiancé, too!

"I'm sorry, Lili," she faltered. "It isn't any of my business I know, but Chan loves you very much. He's given up going after speed records with his plane because you asked him to, and he hasn't so much as looked at another girl since you became engaged."

"Don't be so sure," Lili said scathingly. "Chan has courted half the stars in Hollywood, at one time or another. I just happen to be the biggest and brightest, and that appeals to his vanity. I'm not so sure it's real love with him, that he wouldn't tire of me the moment I was out of the lime-light, that's why I don't intend to give up my career."

"Then you should tell him," Beth insisted.

Lili smiled aggravatingly. "I will, in my own good time. Anyway, Beth, it's not your affair. Your silly plan to quit couldn't possibly have anything to do with Chan, could it? It's preposterous, of course, but every girl who looks at him thinks he's her dream man. I suppose you're no exception."

"I'm not," Beth replied, bluntly. She didn't care if Lili knew the truth. "I wanted to quit because I didn't want to be here when you married him. But if you have no intention of doing so I'll stay on until this picture is finished."

"Oh, I didn't say I wouldn't marry him eventually," Lili said with exasperating calm. Beth knew she was enjoying this little scene. She relished being envied. "Chan will take me, career and all, when I get ready to marry him. It just appeals to his masculine vanity to think he can make me give it up!"

Beth broke in disgustedly, "You don't really know Chan at all, Lili. He's serious now. For the first time in his life he is really in love and if you care about him at all, you won't play with his affections." She added coolly. "You won't be famous forever. You haven't saved a cent of your fabulous salary, and you won't be able to give up all the luxury you've become accustomed to. You'll need the security Chan can give you, later on."

Her voice changed to a defiant note. "You're the luckiest girl in the world to have Chan Duryea's love!"

Lili laughed. "Beth, you would have made a great dramatic actress. You're so naive. You think I'm selfish and ruthless but it's the only way to survive in this crazy town. Now do be a good child and let's forget the whole thing. I'm going to raise your salary as of now. I'll give you my new mink coat too." She made a move toward Beth but the other girl backed away protesting, " I don't want a raise or your mink coat, Lili."

Lili's manner changed abruptly. "All right," she snapped, "I was just trying to be regular."

The phone rang then and she said excitedly, "That's probably Breck Colton wondering what is delaying me. Tell him I'll be at our usual place in fifteen minutes, will you, Beth."

"What about Chan?" Beth reminded. "He said he'd call at seven."

"Cover up for me," Lili pleaded. "Chan will believe anything you tell him. He thinks you're the most honest person in the world. He'd never believe you know how to lie so convincingly."

Beth turned away, her heart contracting as Lili rushed from the room.

WHEN SHE got to the phone, there was no one on the line. She walked back slowly into the luxurious lime and white living room. She was confused and annoyed with herself for not quitting as she had planned. She couldn't go on with this subterfuge, without getting to be like Lili, eventually. She wasn't sincere and honest as Chan had said. She had been lying to him for months—every time Lili had a date with Breck Colton, which was frequently. Breck, a handsome, reckless young actor, was madly in love with Lili. Beth was afraid of him, and she shuddered to think what he would do when he discovered Lili had just been playing with heart. Something terrible was bound to happen then, something that she couldn't cover up for Lili.

Lili's maid, in trim black, entered the room just then with a huge red and black box in her hand. "This just came for Miss Jocelyn," she announced. Beth took it from her, wondering what it was. She usually bought all of Lili's clothes. She untied the heavy cord, took off the cover of the box, then gasped. It was a pale green camel hair coat with a hood, lined in jade dyed mole skin. It must have cost a fortune!

She wondered, puzzled, when Lili had bought it. She never had a moment for anything but her work and dates.

Beth had never been envious of Lili's clothes or jewels but somehow she couldn't resist the temptation to try on this coat. She slipped into it, and it's soft luxury was like a caress. She drew the hood over her head and started toward a mirror in the far corner of the room when suddenly behind her a voice said huskily, "Hello darling, you got the coat I see." Beth whirled around but before she could speak, strong arms clasped her tightly, and Chan's lips came down on hers in a kiss that took her breath away.

Beth started to draw back, then thought crazily, Why shouldn't I have this moment to cherish forever? And all her secret love was in the response she made. Chan murmured. "I should catch you off guard like this all the time, Lili. You've never kissed me like this before."

Beth drew away quickly. The hood fell back, an she said haltingly," Chan, I—"

Chan's dark, magnetic eyes widened in shocked surprise. There was a hint of anger in his voice as he said roughly, "Beth! You—" He seemed unable to go on as they stood staring at each other wordlessly, both still shaken by the kiss.

Then Chan laughed and it was like ice water trickling down Beth's spine. He said, "That was a pretty stupid mistake on my part wasn't it? It was the coat that threw me. Lili saw it last night at a shop in the Ambassador where we had dinner. I thought, of course, it was she—"

"It was a natural mistake," Beth cut in evenly, feeling momentarily sorry for Chan's obvious embarrassment. "I should have warned you but you took me so by surprise."

There was a note of challenge in Beth's voice as if she were daring Chan to rebuke her for taking something that didn't belong to her. She finished breathlessly, "There was no harm done. I'm sure Lili would understand. But if it will embarrass you I won't tell her!"

Chan's face flushed. He said gruffly, "I'll tell her myself."

Beth could feel her face flush. She was sure that Chan knew that she had snatched hungrily at the chance to kiss him with her heart on her lips.

He asked suddenly, "By the way, where is Lili?"

"She's out," Beth replied, trying desperately to think of a plausible excuse and failing miserably.

Chan laughed mockingly. "That's obvious. Out where?"

"I don't know," Beth admitted, suddenly annoyed. Let Lili make up her own excuses from now on.

"That's rather unusual, isn't it?" Chan sparred. "You usually know every move

Lili makes. You haven't had an argument with her, have you?"

"Oh, no," Beth insisted hastily. The phone rang just then and she excused herself to answer it, relieved to escape the inquisitive gleam in Chan's eyes.

It was Lili on the phone. She asked if Chan had phoned and Beth said guardedly, "He's here now."

"Oh, dear," Lili complained. "I suppose you can't talk then. I hope you gave him a good excuse."

"Not yet," Beth hedged. "I haven't had time."

"Well, tell him I'm with Myra Lynch, that she's had a spat with her new husband and I'm trying to console her. It's not a lie because she is here with us."

"Wait a moment," Beth advised. "I'll put Chan on the phone and you can tell him yourself."

"No," Lili cried exasperatedly but Beth had already motioned to Chan.

Beth went back into the living room and tried not to listen to the conversation but she couldn't avoid it. Chan said banteringly, "Hi, glamour gal, what's the idea of running out on our dinner date?"

He was silent as Lili gave a lengthy explanation then he said, "Oh, I see. Well, that's too bad but why can't I pick you both up and we'll have dinner at Vestoff's. I've reserved a table."

Lili talked again. Beth could hear her voice, high and excited, the way it always was when she was in a tight spot. Chan finally said resignedly, "Okay, Lili, but I'm hungry and I don't feel like dining alone. Mind if I ask Beth to have dinner with me?"

There was another pause while Lili chattered again. Then Chan laughed. Beth was sure there was a hint of scorn in that laugh. Was he suspicious and trying to incite Lili's jealousy by suggesting that Beth have dinner with him?

Beth thought mutinously, I won't go. There is a limit to being a stand-in and I've reached it! Just then Chan called, "Lili wants to talk to you again, Beth." There was a broad smile on his face as he handed the receiver to her.

Lili said, low and tense, "Chan is evidently angry because I broke our dinner date and he's trying to get even by inviting you to dinner. He probably thinks I'll swoon with jealousy. It's the first date I ever broke with him and he has broken plenty with me—for business, he always claims. I've told him that I think it's a grand idea to take you to dinner. After what you told me tonight, you should be thrilled!"

"I am," Beth said candidly, deciding on the instant that she would accept Chan's invitation. She would go to dinner with Chan, she'd dance with him. For one night she would pretend he was hers.

"Wear one of my gowns, my mink coat and dark glasses." Lili ordered. "No one will know the difference then. I don't want the gossips saying that Chan and I have quarrelled and that he's dating my stand-in."

"Then you had better get back here and keep that dinner date yourself," Beth retorted. "I'm not going anywhere in disguise!"

"My, but you are getting independent," Lili complained. "All right, wear anything you please. No one would take Chan's dating you seriously anyway!"

THERE WAS a sharp click in Beth's ear. Lili was furious. She never could take independence of any sort. She had to be the one to dole out the commands. It was mutiny if anyone protested.

Beth exulted secretly as she walked back into the living room. Maybe Chan was using her to get a rise out of Lili but at last it showed he had some spirit.

He was standing at the window looking out. He said without turning, "Are you dining with me, Beth?"

"Yes," Beth replied, "But you'll have to wait until I dress."

He turned slowly. "You look okay to me just as you are," he said. "I've always liked that green suit. Don't bother to change."

She shrugged and murmured, "Okay, but I'd like to powder my nose, at least."

"I'll wait in the car." Chan said as he walked toward the door. Beth ran upstairs to her room with the oddest feeling of fear and elation. She powdered her nose, smoothed on more lipstick, then tied a gayly colored scarf around her head. Chan always drove his roadster with the top down.

But as she walked toward the driveway

her good spirits deflated a bit. Chan sat at the wheel of his car, staring moodily ahead as if he already regretted inviting her to dinner. He managed a cheerful smile as she got in beside him and as the powerful car roared out of the driveway he said suddenly, "Thanks for being such a good sport, Beth. I'm feeling rather sunk tonight." He laughed apologetically and confided, "Afraid to be alone, I guess."

She looked at him in surprise. "But why?"

He said, "My new plane arrived today, the speed job I ordered before I promised Lili I wouldn't go out for any more records. It's out at the field now and I'm like a kid on Christmas morning with a new toy. I want to try it out—that's why I didn't want to be alone. I'm afraid I couldn't trust myself to stay away from it."

"Well, just looking at it won't do any harm, will it?"

"I couldn't just look," Chan confessed. "I'd want to try it out."

"Why didn't you cancel the order and avoid temptation?" Beth asked curiously.

"I figured it was just a fear of Lili's that I could overcome in time," Chan explained. "After all, with fifty combat misions to my credit in the war, I'm not exactly a novice. I didn't realize it was going to be hard to stay on the ground but it's like giving up something that has grown to be a part of me."

"Then you shouldn't have made the promise." Beth said reprovingly and realized that she was talking out of turn.

Chan's voice was gruff as he replied, "A man will promise anything when he's in love. I guess I was flattered that Lili loved me enough to be concerned about my safety."

Beth could think of no reply to that so silence enveloped them until they arrived at Vestoff's.

She had a sinking feeling as they walked into the cerise-walled lobby and heard the chatter and light laughter of Hollywood's stars. Despite Lili's spiteful remark, Beth knew that tongues would wag when it was discovered that it was Lili's stand-in who was dining with Chan Duryea!

Vestoff, a slim, dapper man with an exaggerated accent, greeted Chan reproachfully. "You are late, my friend, I thought you weren't coming so I gave your table to a visiting British director and his party. I have just one table left—in a far corner, if Miss Jocelyn doesn't object."

Beth waved her hand dismissingly, as Lili always did when she wanted service quickly. Her hand went up imperiously, her eyes were straight ahead as she followed Vestoff to the table in the corner. If she had fooled Vestoff, who knew Lili so well, maybe no one else in the room would discover she wasn't Lili. She still held the pose as Chan gave their order to the waiter. As he left, Chan chided goodnaturedly, "You can relax now and be yourself, Beth. You carried that off beautifully."

Beth felt suddenly foolish. "I suppose it does seem ridiculous to pose as Lili."

"Not ridiculous, just unnecessary," Chan corrected. "I'm dining with Beth Cameron and I don't care who knows it!"

She flushed with pleasure at the sincerity of his remark but she wished he would stop looking at her so searchingly. In an effort to keep their conversation impersonal, she asked, "What are you going to do about the plane, Chan?"

He looked sheepish. "I'd planned to tell Lili about it tonight. I want to show it to her and see if I could get her to release me from that promise."

Just then Ina Vale, one of Hollywood's leading columnists, descended on them. "I must tell you, Lili, I've never seen you looking so utterly charming—and years younger, it seems to me." She stopped short as Beth smiled up at her. She gasped. "You aren't Lili Jocelyn!"

"No, I'm her stand-in. Lili is resting tonight. She has an early call tomorrow."

Ina laughed, embarrassed. "What a stupid mistake for me to make. Sorry." She left the table hastily and Beth said laughingly to cover up an awkward moment, "This seems to be the night for stupid mistakes, doesn't it?"

Chan looked at her levelly, and she wished suddenly that she hadn't made the tactless remark.

He agreed dryly, "It would seem so, but you are equal to all emergencies aren't you? I had no idea you could lie so glibly. Lili certainly has a priceless jewel in you." He was silent a moment. Then he asked abruptly, "Beth, what are you going to do when Lili marries me and retires."

She pretended great interest in her champagne before she replied, "Oh, I'll go back East to my old job as secretary, I guess."

"You're not serious, are you?" Chan protested incredulously.

"Oh, but I am," Beth assured him. There's nothing at all in Hollywood to keep me."

"But you could have a career of your own," Chan pointed out. "It isn't generally known, but I've an interest in Monarch Studios. Just say the word and—"

"Thanks-but-no," Beth said firmly. "I haven't the slightest interest in a motion picture career."

"Well, you don't have to be so angry about it," Chan said.

"Who says I'm angry?"

He grinned. "You have two red flags in your cheeks, honey, I've seen them there before, when you were burning up inside. That night when Lili gave the party announcing our engagement for instance, and that rejected suitor of hers made a pass at you." He chuckled softly. "I thought sure you were going to slap him!"

Beth gestured impatiently with her hand and Chan threw back his head and laughed.

"What's so funny?" Beth demanded testily.

"That gesture was Lili all over. Whenever she wants to change the subject she just waves her hand, brushing it aside."

Chan's eyes went dreamy as he mused, "Lili is really amazing the way she has climbed to stardom, surmounting every obstable, not letting anything stand in her way. You can't help admiring courage and determination like that, can you?"

"No," Beth agreed. She thought despairingly, I thought Lili didn't really know Chan, but she does—better than I do. It's what she stands for that he loves and admires. If she gives it up, he'll probably lose interest just as she said he would.

THE DINNER came and Chan ate heartily but Beth just picked at the delicious food. The evening had suddenly gone flat. All she wanted to do now was to go home.

Chan asked suddenly, "Dance, Beth?"

She was on the point of refusing but thought better of it. She was impatient with herself for thrilling to his nearness as they danced smoothly together to the music.

A couple barged into them at that moment. Beth was thrown violently against him. She felt his arm tighten around her protectingly, his cheek pressed against hers. Then he said huskily, "Let's sit down and and leave the dance floor to the cowboys."

Beth knew why he stopped so suddenly. He felt as she did, that there was a spark between them which close contact fanned into a flame. But he couldn't afford to let his heart rule his head. He would marry Lili Jocelyn, the brightest star in Hollywood, and be the envy of half the male population in America.

Back at the table, Chan seemed suddenly restless as he sipped his coffee. His eyes avoided Beth's. Finally he said, "Let's get out of here and go for a ride. It's a beautiful night."

Beth wanted to go home but she didn't want Chan to get the impression that she was piqued because he had stopped dancing with her so suddenly. She said agreeably, "I'd like that."

Later, in the car when he asked her if there were any special place she would like to drive, she replied, "Go anywhere you like."

Chan chuckled softly and Beth glanced at him, wondering what amused him. Her heart tightened painfully as she looked at his clear cut profile. She closed her eyes quickly and leaned back to shut out the sight of his face. It was a heavenly night. The bright moon and stars were like a silver umbrella overhead. The air was heady wine. The even rhythm of the car's motor made her drowsy. She must have dozed off, for the next thing she knew there was the steady hum of many motors.

She sat up suddenly asking in a startled voice, "Where are we?"

"At the airfield," Chan replied laconically. "You told me to go anywhere I liked." He laughed teasingly.

Beth cried in protest, "Now don't blame me because you couldn't resist temptation."

"Oh, a little peek won't hurt," Chan said airily. "I've decided to say nothing to Lili and dispose of the plane tomorrow."

"When did you decide that?" Beth asked as he helped her out of the car and they started toward the hangar.

He grinned down at her. "While we were driving up here and you were peace-

fully sleeping. I figured telling Lili about the plane would only cause an argument and I hate arguments. So tomorrow I'll get in touch with Vince Tulane. He'll jump at the chance to buy it. He'll probably break all records with it, too."

Beth sensed a note of dejection in his voice that made her momentarily sorry for him. He was making a sacrifice for Lili, unaware that she had no intention of marrying him when her present picture was finished. She had a wild desire to say, "Why be so hasty?" But it was none of her business, so she remained quiet.

Chan was hurrying and Beth had to almost run to keep up with his long strides. He was greeted heartily on all sides, by mechanics and other flyers. Someone called out to him, "Your new job is over in the corner of the hangar, Chan. It's a lulu. You'll break all records with it, I'll bet!"

Beth knew very little about planes but when Chan stopped before a gleaming metal job with sleek, stream lines, she thought dismally, I wouldn't want that for a rival.

Chan opened the door of the cockpit and instructed, "Hop in, Beth." She drew back in alarm.

He laughed. "What are you afraid of? I can't take off from here, but I've got to get behind the controls—just once!"

Gingerly, she mounted the small ladder, then settled back in the bucket seat. Chan ran around to the other side and climbed in beside her. Years seemed to have dropped away from him. He played around with the complicated instrument board like an eager child on Christmas morning. Beth sat watching him silently, a queer ache in her heart, until he finally turned to her and said with an embarrassed laugh, "You're the best sport in the world, Beth. This is probably boring you to death. Come on, I'll take you home."

They walked out of the hangar silently then, without warning, a flash light bulb popped in their faces. Chan cried angrily, "Hey, what is this anyway?"

The photographer laughed and taunted as he made a dash for a waiting car. "Read the *Morning Star,* Mr. Duryea. Best paper on the coast! Has all the timely news —with pictures!"

Chan stood looking after him angrily until Beth said impatiently, "Let's go, Chan. There's no point in being upset. You should be used to publicity by now."

"But why did he have to sneak up on us as if we were doing something secretive?" Chan protested. He paused and started to laugh. "Well, I guess I was," he admitted. "Now I'll have to tell Lili before she sees that picture in the paper."

Chan tried to make polite conversation on the way home but Beth knew that he was worried. Lili's pale pink stucco mansion was ablaze with light as they came into the driveway, and Chan grumbled, "I hope Lili isn't throwing one of her impromptu parties."

Beth hoped so too. She fumbled with her key opening the door and the strains of Iturbi playing boogie-woogie came to them from the living room, but otherwise there was an ominous silence. They walked toward the living room, a feeling of apprehension weighing Beth down.

Lili was stretched out on a divan of jade velvet, a perfect background for the rainbow-hued hostess gown she was wearing. Her eyes were closed, but Beth knew she was feigning sleep. Her make-up was recently applied. Her hair was too smooth. Everything was too set and Beth wondered what she was up to now. Her voice was edgy as she called, "Lili, we're back."

Lili jumped up, pretending confusion beautifully. She rushed to Chan with an exaggerated cry of sweetness. "Chan, darling, I was just dreaming about you!" She threw her arms around his neck and Chan looked thoroughly bewildered, and a trifle sheepish.

"How long have you been home?" he asked.

"Oh, ages," Lili replied, stifling a pretty yawn. "I'm dead tired but I was sure you would be along any minute so I waited up for you." She looked at Beth coolly. She said abruptly, "How about making us a nice, long, cool drink? I told Mattie to go to bed."

Beth went to the huge silver and white kitchen to make the drinks. Her fingers trembled ridiculously. The glasses jingled against each other like bells as she put them on a silver tray. Then as she pushed open the swinging door with her foot she heard Lili say in a hurt voice, "Chan, how could you break your promise to me?"

Beth stood still not knowing what to do as Chan protested, "I didn't break my

promise, Lili. I've told you I intend to sell the plane tomorrow!"

"You're not selling your desire to risk your life and our happiness for speed records," Lili reminded angrily. "Sooner or later it will triumph. You expected me to give up my career to marry you. Well I won't. You have your flying, Chan, so I'll keep my career!"

"You mean you won't marry me?" Chan demanded and Beth thought she sensed a peculiar note of relief in his voice. She rattled the tray to warn them she was approaching but Lili paid no attention as she drawled, "I didn't say I wouldn't marry you, Chan, but I won't give up my career for marriage now. I'd be a fool."

Chan's eyes blazed at Lili. "Did you ever intend to give it up?" he challenged.

"Did you ever intend to give up flying?" Lili countered hotly.

Beth felt like the target for flying swords as she held the tray out to Lili, then walked over to Chan. She turned to leave the room but Lili asked sharply, "Where are you going, Beth. Where's your drink?"

"I'm not thirsty," Beth replied. "I'd like to retire if there's nothing else you want."

Lili waved her hand in the familiar dismissing gesture and Beth left the room hurriedly. Chan called after her, "Goodnight, Beth. Thanks for a lovely evening!"

"Goodnight, Chan," Beth said without turning.

Her room adjoined Lili's. She undressed hurriedly, put out the lights and went to bed. She was in no mood for a session with Lili after Chan left. She felt as torn up inside as if the quarrel were her own. She wondered fleetingly if Lili would break her engagement to Chan. Suppose she did? It meant nothing to Beth, except that she would not see Chan again and that was much better. A flame eventually dies down without fuel to keep it bright.

SHE TRIED to sleep but it was no use. An hour later when Lili came upstairs and called through the door to Beth she pretended to be asleep. Then presently she did doze off and was awakened by the sound of sobbing from Lili's room. She sat up and listened, her heart beating heavily. She'd never heard Lili cry like that before. Usually her tears were over with as quickly as a California summer shower.

Beth got up, put on a robe and went into Lili's room. Lili was lying across the huge circular bed, her face buried in an apple green satin pillow. Her bright gold hair was spread like a fan around her head. Chan's ring still gleamed on her finger so the engagement was not broken yet.

She asked gently, "What is it Lili?" Lili made no indication that she heard. Beth sat down beside her and said sternly, "You've got to stop this crying, Lili. Your eyes will look terrible in the morning."

"I don't care," Lili cried wildly. "I don't care about anything." She sat up suddenly, pushing her hair away from her face and sobbed, "I'll never trust another man as long as I live. I thought Chan was reliable and tonight after that awful experience I had with Breck Colton, I realized how much I really loved Chan. I'd made up my mind to marry him at once, to give up my career if he insisted. Then I get this slap in the face. He takes you to look at his new plane after promising me to give up flying. If that photographer hadn't snapped your picture, he never would have told me."

"And you'd have married him and everything would have been okay," Beth pointed out. "Why don't you just make believe it never happened."

"Make believe!" Lili raged. "That's what my whole life is." She buried her head on Beth's shoulder and sobbed wildly again. "I love him so, Beth, I haven't dared to admit how much. I was afraid to be so vulnerable with a man like Chan and now—"

"What happened with Breck Colton?" Beth cut in to get Lili's mind off Chan for the moment.

Lili shuddered. "It was awful, Beth. He wanted me to elope with him. We were away up in the hills at a roadhouse. I was afraid of the publicity if I phoned for a cab. I tried to pacify Breck. I told him I'd think it over, and after a while he seemed to be okay. But the moment he got behind the wheel of his car he started driving crazily, threatening to go over the cliff if I didn't promise to marry him. I promised, to get home safely but it came to me then in a flash, what you had said about Chan being so safe and secure and how fleeting fame is. I couldn't get back here fast

enough to see Chan, feel the safety of his arms around me again. But I didn't dare seem too eager. You can't be with a man like Chan—that's why I pretended to be asleep." Lili shrugged hopelessly and started toying with Chan's ring.

Beth asked impatiently, "Well, how does it stand now?"

"Oh, we're still engaged," Lili said indifferently. "If we broke off now it would look like a publicity stunt just as my picture is going to be released. I've told Chan to go ahead with his flying and I'll make another picture. If at the end of that time he feels our marriage means more to him than flying, why—" Lili broke off with a weary gesture, then added, "It won't work out. I'll never be sure of Chan again. He was so different tonight—as if he had a protecting shell around him. I can't be half way with Chan. I must either love him so that I'll possess his every thought or I'll have to forget him."

Beth was silent; then Lili said, "You should be able to understand that. You love him, too, don't you?"

Beth smiled enigmatically, "I'm not so sure now that I know what love really is. Certainly it's not yours or Chan's brand." Her voice altered authoritatively, "Now get some sleep or you'll be no good tomorrow!"

Everything went wrong at the studio the next day. Lili had a hysterical spell after her first scene and Beth had to be rushed in for some of her long shots. Chan and Beth's picture was on the front page of the *Morning Star* over the crytic caption: "Is Lili Jocelyn planning an air elopement with Chan Duryea?"

At lunch time Lili's manager, Clark Case, came storming into her portable dressing room with the newspaper in his hand. "What's the meaning of this?" he demanded. "You've been told to stay out of the air!"

He flung the newspaper down and glared angrily at Lili. "Just when I was putting over the biggest deal of your career you have to pull a stunt like this," he raged. "I had you practically set for the picture that's sure to cop the Academy Award next year. Now they're starting to hedge. They're afraid to take a chance on you."

"Why don't they check up on the facts," Lili blazed. "I was home last night. That was Beth with Chan. It's about time the studio judged me on past performances, not future. What's the big idea you have on the fire?" Her tone was indifferent but Beth sensed an underlying eagerness.

Clark said smugly, "The part of Lotta, in *His Wives.*"

Lili's green eyes widened with excitement. She cried, "Oh, Clark, not really! I'd given up hope of landing it. They said it was too dramatic for me, that I couldn't handle it. But I know I could!"

"I do too," Clark agreed. "And with Breck Colton playing the male lead, it will be the picture of the year!"

"Breck Colton!" Lili cried in dismay.

Clark said assuringly, "He'll be okay. He realizes this is the biggest break he'll ever get. Now I'm going to run along to the front office and tell them."

Lili turned stricken eyes to Beth. "My luck," she said bitterly. "If I could play that part, I'd be willing to quit forever and rest on my laurels. But Breck Colton!" She shook her head then instructed Beth, "Get Chan on the phone for me, Beth. I'm going to tell him I didn't mean what I said last night. I'm not going to take any chances on weakening about *His Wives.* I'm going to marry Chan the moment this picture is finished!"

Beth called Chan's number with the feeling of watching a Noel Coward farce unfold. She hoped he would be home and that he would come flying over and go into the final fade out with Lili. Then, maybe her own heart would stop its hopeful dreaming.

Chan's house boy answered the phone. He said, "Mr. Duryea is out testing his new plane. I don't know when he'll return."

Lili's face mirrored every emotion in the book as Beth gave her the message. She raged, "He didn't lose any time getting into the air again. I hope he breaks his fool neck!"

"You can't mean that!" Beth cried.

"And why not?" Lili blazed, waving her hands excitedly. "Me, Lili Jocelyn, who could have any man I want, losing my heart to a man who calmly puts it in his pocket while he flies around trying to break speed records!"

"That isn't your heart that's tearing you apart," Beth insisted quietly. "You're angry because he won't listen to you."

Lili eyed Beth stormily a moment; then

she said wistfully, "I'd give anything in the world to have your gift for controlling my emotions."

"It isn't a gift," Beth replied gently. "It's something you can acquire, too, Lili. Now fix your make-up."

Beth was detained on the set for some lighting effects after Lili's next scene. When she got back to Lili's dressing room she was amazed to find Breck Colton there. He was sitting close to Lili, holding her hand and talking in low, earnest tones. Beth withdrew hastily and sat down outside on a camp chair.

Presently Breck came out and as he strode arrogantly away Beth thought suddenly, He's the man for Lili. They're evenly matched in every way.

To Beth's surprise, Lili offered no comment about Breck's visit. She usually told Beth everything but now, her face was a set mask. She was ominously silent as Beth drove her home in the station wagon.

As they entered the driveway they saw Chan's car parked just ahead of them. He was sitting in the patio waiting for Lili. Beth stole a glance at Lili out of the corner of her eye. Lili retained her mask of indifference when Chan got up and said smilingly, "Hello, sorry I wasn't in for the call. Nothing wrong I hope?" Lili's indifference suddenly melted. She said lightly, "Nothing wrong, Chan. I just wanted to talk to you about last night. Why not have dinner with us and we can talk afterward?"

"All right," Chan agreed but there was a guarded look in his eyes.

"Make yourself comfortable while I change clothes," Lili said. "I'll have Mattie fix a drink for you."

BETH WENT directly to her room. Lili came in a moment later and said apologetically, "You won't mind if I dine with Chan alone tonight, will you, Beth?"

"Of course not," Beth replied without looking up. "I intended having a tray in my room anyway."

It was about and hour later that Lili called upstairs to Beth. "Will you come down, please. Chan wants to talk to you, Beth?"

Beth's pulses quickened as she thought, Now what? She had changed into butcher blue linen slacks, her hair was high on her head after a vigorous brushing, and her face was scrubbed clean of make-up. She descended the stairs with leaden steps, her nerves dancing edgily.

Lili, all in white, was seated on the jade divan, a glass of champagne in her hand. Her eyes were unusually bright and her smile set and brittle. Chan was sitting opposite her, a worried look on his face. He got up as Beth entered the room and Lili said sweetly, "Have some champagne, Beth?" Beth noticed that her hand shook as she poured some champagne into a glass and motioned Beth to sit down beside her.

Lili said with exaggerated calm, "Beth, I think you should be the first to know that I have been jilted."

"Lili," Chan protested, his face reddening.

Lili waved him to silence. "Now, Chan, let's be practical. You were a perfect gentleman about it, to say that you want to compete in the Transcontinental Air Race and that you don't feel you have the right to marry me when I'm so set against your flying. But the fact remains that I told you I would marry you just the same. You insist that we wait a while and for me to go ahead and make another picture."

She turned to Beth and asked bluntly, "Wouldn't you call that a polite way of being jilted, Beth?"

Beth felt bright spots of color rise in her cheeks. She set her glass carefully down on the coffee stand and said quietly, "If this is what you called me downstairs for, Lili, it could have waited until later." Try as she would to keep her eyes away from Chan's face, he seemed to be silently commanding her to look at him.

Her heart beat violently at the intensity of his stare as he said in a low voice, "I wanted to speak to you, Beth. I'm giving a breakfast on Sunday morning for some Marine flyer pals of mine. Will you come?"

Beth looked from Chan to Lili, confused, and Lili laughed. "Oh, I'm invited too. Chan and I are still going to be the best of friends. You'll come, of course?"

"Yes," Beth replied. "I'll be glad to come."

"Fine!" Lili cried gayly. "Now let's drink to Chan's heart's desire—winning the Transcontinental Air Race!"

"And to your heart's desire," Chan reminded, pointedly. "Winning the Academy Award!"

Lili's face flushed. "All right, to each of our heart's desires but that leaves Beth out."

She looked at Beth and said, "We must drink to your heart's desire, too, Beth. What is it?"

Beth looked slowly from Chan to Lili then she said deliberately, "I'm not so sure I have a heart, but I'm positive I have no desire that I can't control." She raised her glass, "Happy Landings, Chan, the same to you, Lili."

Back in her own room, Beth felt a smarting moisture in her eyes, but she refused to give in to tears. She wasn't at all sure what she would be crying about. She heard Chan's car drive away. Lili retired without saying good night to her.

The next day she maintained a polite, icy calm and when Clark Case came to her dressing room she asked Beth to leave. That was something she had never done before.

Beth knew now she must quit. The situation was becoming intolerable. But before she could say anything to Lili about it, Lili said, "You'll be happy to know I've been given the part of Lotta. It's going to be a tough picture for you, Beth, but I intend to give you a substantial bonus."

"I won't be here," Beth said flatly. "I'm quitting as soon as this picture is finished and that is final!"

Lili smiled a cool calculating smile. "I expected that," she mused. "You would naturally want to be in New York when Chan gets there but I'm warning you, Beth, if you run after him, you'll never get him. I made the mistake of going soft with him."

Beth was speechless with anger that Lili mistook for guilt. She continued in a slow drawl, "I haven't lost Chan, yet, Beth, and I don't intend to lose him. I know that something has changed him temporarily but I'll overcome it if you will only play fair."

"What do you mean?" Beth gasped.

Lili flared angrily, "What happened that night he took you out to dinner? He's been different ever since. Did you tell him about Breck Colton?"

"No, I didn't," Beth retorted, stung by the false accusation. "But if you hadn't had that frightening experience with Breck you'd have continued stringing Chan along indefinitely.

She stopped short as Lili seemed to crumble suddenly. Tears gushed to her employer's eyes. She pleaded, "Beth, please, we mustn't quarrel and part bad friends." She held her hand out to Beth but Beth ignored it. Lili begged, "Please forget what I said. I tried to keep it to myself but when you said you were quitting, I—" She shrugged helplessly.

Beth cried in exasperation, "That Academy Award is practically in your pocket, Lili. You're a very great dramatic actress!"

"I'm a fiend," Lili replied with unexpected humility. "But I'm going to try to be better and I do love Chan, Beth. Maybe it isn't your idea of love but it's the only kind I know and it's Chan's kind, too. Don't forget that he didn't play fair with me to buy that plane after he'd promised to give up flying. And his sudden interest in you is to incite my jealousy, no doubt. But certainly it isn't very flattering to you. If he thinks you'd settle for a warmed-over heart, he—"

"I'm not interested in what Chan thinks," Beth interrupted angrily. "I can't leave here soon enough to get away from the both of you."

"But you're going to Chan's breakfast, aren't you?" Lili hedged. "If you don't go he might think I had something to do with it."

Beth cried impatiently, "How can you be in love with a man and suspect him of so many petty faults?"

"I'm far from perfect myself," Lili reminded. "My heart is one thing I can't rule." Impulsively she leaned over and kissed Beth on the cheek. "I love you, too, Beth. I'm afraid to think of what I'm going to do without you, but if your mind is made up—"

"It is," Beth said decisively. This time nothing would sway her from her resolve.

The picture was finished the next day. Lili gave a party on the set for the cast and crew. Her good friend, Laura Winters, a columnist was there, too. She got the exclusive on Lili's postponed marriage to Chan.

It was a carefully worded article to the effect that studio commitments made postponment of the marriage imperative. It gave Lili all the best of it. Laura said with a deep sigh as she finished writing it,

"Too bad you can't overcome your fear of the air, Lili."

"I'm not afraid of the air," Lili protested. "It's studio orders."

"Now, Lili," Laura chided, laughingly. "You know you would never fly, even before you went to work here."

Lili flushed and changed the subject abruptly but Beth could tell she was mulling something over in her mind. Beth awoke early Sunday morning with a feeling of depression. She dreaded going to Chan's breakfast but it would be the last time she would see him. She dressed carefully in soft gray outfit, swim suit skirt and blouse to match. Chan had a pool and they would probably go swimming first.

As they left the house Beth asked Lili, "Got your bathing cap?"

"I haven't the energy to swim today," Lili replied languidly. "I'm going to lie in the sun and rest."

CHAN'S HOUSE was high on a hill overlooking all of Hollywood. It was a modest, low rambling white house. The swimming pool was built into the side of the hill on a plateau. Beth was an expert swimmer. Lili seldom went into the pool when Beth did.

Chan was having a swim when they arrived. He invited them to join him since the other guests had not arrived. Lili declined. "Later, maybe. Right now I'm going to have some coffee."

"What about you, Beth?" Chan called. "Coming in?" Beth nodded. She piled her hair into the bright red cap she had brought, and then made a beautiful dive into the water. The pool was a sheer drop of almost fifty feet. Chan swam over to her as she came up. His lithe, bronzed body glistened in the sunlight. He said admiringly, "Good morning, Beth. That was a beautiful dive. How about racing me up to the end of the pool?"

"No contest." Beth laughed back. "I'd need a handicap!"

"I'm the one who needs a handicap," Chan corrected gently. Beth struck out in the water to get away from the warm look in his eyes. He followed close behind her but she reached the end of the pool ahead of him. When he came abreast of her he said, "There you did beat me."

"You weren't trying," Beth accused. Their eyes met in a steady glance and Chan said in a low voice, as if the words were wrung from him by force, "It wouldn't do me any good now would it, Beth?"

"No," Beth replied, her voice catching. "It wouldn't!"

Chan's friends arrived just then in several cars. Lili was on the patio having coffee. Chan and Beth hastened up the steps from the pool and as they dried themselves with huge turkish towels, Chan called to his guests, "Be with you in a moment. Meet Miss Jocelyn. Introduce yourselves."

The bronzed healthy looking young men crowded around Lili at once. The girls with them hung back, watching her in awe. Beth had never seen Lili put herself out to be so gracious before and when one boy said, "I've been waiting a long time to meet my pin-up girl in person," Lili replied sweetly, "I hope you're not disappointed."

There was a chorus of wolf whistles in reply and Lili blushed modestly. Chan came up with Beth then and introduced her. One boy exclaimed, "I didn't know Lili had a twin sister!"

"Oh, I'm not her twin," Beth replied. "I'm her stand-in."

"Gosh," the boy replied, grinning at Chan, "it must be confusing to you. How do you tell them apart?"

"That's easy," Lili spoke up, laughing. "Beth is Dr. Jekyll, I'm Mr. Hyde!" Everyone laughed and the party got off to a nice start but Beth noticed a puzzled look on Chan's face as he watched Lili exerting herself to be the life of the party.

It was Lili who finally brought up the Air Race. She held her cup high and said, "Here's to Chan's bringing back the Air Trophy."

"He's a cinch," someone declared. "Chan is the greatest flyer in America today. Don't you think so, Miss Jocelyn?"

"Lili has never flown with me," Chan cut in hastily. "She's afraid of the air!"

"Who says I'm afraid?" Lili retorted, challengingly. I have a ten day vacation coming up. I'd like to go to Mexico. Will you fly me there, Chan?" Their eyes locked a moment and Beth saw new admiration creep into his eyes. He said slowly, "Of course, Lili. I'd be glad to fly you."

"I'll wait for you to come back," Lili insisted.

Someone asked, "When is the Air Race, Chan, or is it a secret?"

Chan nodded. "We don't want a crowd around when we take off. Someone might get hurt in the excitement." He switched the subject abruptly and suggested a swim but Lili said, "I really must be going now, Chan. I've got to spend the afternoon reading my new script. Please don't let me break up the party, though. Have a good time everybody."

Chan walked to the car with them. I'll give you a ring tomorrow, before—" He stopped short and Beth knew at that instant that the race would be the next day. But if Lili noticed she gave no sign. She kissed him hard on the lips and said, "I'll be rooting for you and my heart will be with you all the way to New York and back, darling."

Beth held out her hand and said simply, "The best of luck, Chan." He murmured, "Thanks, Beth. I think I'll make it okay!"

Lili went directly to her room when they got home and stayed there for the rest of the day. Beth tried hard to put the episode in the swimming pool out of her mind. Chan was letting a sudden thrilling and unexpected kiss color his emotions. He was still technically engaged to Lili, and he had no right to tell her with his eyes and a few well chosen words that she had stolen his heart.

The next morning Beth awakened early, and switched on the radio softly. The moment the Air Race was under way, she knew it would be announced. She had a feeling it would start that morning.

At eight o'clock it was anouncel that due to unfavorable weather, the Air Race had been postponed. Beth switched off the radio with a sense of relief and went downstairs for breakfast. At ten o'clock, Clark Case phoned and told Beth to see that Lili was in the casting office at two o'clock for a story conference.

When Lili was dressing she asked Beth if the Air Race had started yet.

"It's been postponed," Beth said and changed the subject. "I'll drive you over and if you'll give me a call, I'll come for you too."

At eight o'clock that night when Beth hadn't heard from Lili, she started to get uneasy. She was about to call the studio when she heard a car stop in the driveway then start up again almost immediately with a terrific roar.

Beth waited a moment, expecting to see Lili walk in. When she didn't Beth opened the door, then gasped with alarm. Lili was lying face down on the steps in a crumpled heap.

THERE WAS a deep cut over her right eye and it was swelling fast. She seemed dazed but as Beth helped her into the house, she murmured, "Breck Colton."

"What happened?" Beth demanded, as she helped her down onto the couch and called Mattie to bring the first-aid kit and brandy. It was difficult for Lili to talk coherently. Beth gave her some brandy which seemed to revive her.

In a shaking voice she said, "Breck offered to drive me home from the conference. I could see no harm in that, but on the way he started talking about marriage again. He said that I really loved him and was just marrying Chan because he was rich and famous. I told him I despised him." She stopped for a moment, shuddering. "He didn't say a word after that but when he stopped the car to let me out he started it up again before I was half way out. I was thrown to the steps. I could have been killed, Beth!"

Lili's eye was swollen shut now and discoloring rapidly. Beth said gently, "Come on, Lili, I'll take you up to bed."

As they went upstairs, Lili asked plaintively, "Will my eye be black, Beth?"

"I'm afraid so," Beth replied.

Once in bed, Lili wanted the radio turned on for news of Chan but Beth told her she had been listening all evening and that there was no word. The phone rang at that moment and Lili reached for it saying, "Maybe that's Chan now."

Beth suggested, "Better let me talk. You sound a bit woozy." Lili handed over the phone to Beth. When she answered it and said, "Hello, Clark." Lili lost interest.

Clark's voice was low and controlled as he asked, "Where's Lili?"

"Asleep." Beth told him. "Is anything wrong?" She thought instantly of Breck Colton.

"Plenty," Clark said tersely. "There's been an accident at the airfield. Chan was

testing his plane and something went wrong. He crashed." In that pause, Beth knew that a heart could really stand still, that one could actually stop breathing! Clark went on, "It's pretty bad, Beth. They don't give much hope. I'm at the Baker Hospital now. Break it as gently as possible to Lili and get her over here. The place is swarming with reporters and photographers. If she doesn't show up, they'll be sure to say she is—"

Shocked, that Clark could think of the publicity angle at a time like this, Beth cried distractedly, "I'll get her there right away!"

Her knees were shaking, her brain spinning crazily. She thought with numb shock, I mustn't faint, I mustn't even think now. She rang the buzzer for Mattie then, and tried to arouse Lili. She knew she'd have to break it to her gently or she would go to pieces completely. When Mattie appeared, Beth ordered, "Black coffee, quick!"

But Lili murmured drowsily, "I don't want coffee. I want to sleep."

"You can't," Beth said, making her voice deliberately hard now. "Chan has had an accident. You've got to get to the hospital right away."

Lili sat up, wild-eyed. "I knew it," she cried. "I knew something like this would happen. Oh, Chan, why didn't you listen to me?"

"This is no time for recriminations," Beth advised. "Drink this coffee and get into your clothes. I'll help you."

Lili drank the coffee, then tried to get up. She caught sight of herself in a mirror on the closet door and wailed, "Oh, Beth, my eye! I can't be seen like this. I look as if I'd been in a drunken brawl."

"You can wear dark glasses and your green coat with the hood," Beth said impatiently. "For once think of someone beside yourself!"

Lili tried to get into the dress that Beth held out to her but she sank back on the bed crying, "I can't make it, Beth."

Beth said coldly. "If I can make it, you can. Chan is your fiancé, you know!"

Lili looked up at Beth pleadingly. She was a sorry sight, not much like the glamorous Lili Jocelyn. Beth said gently, "Come on, Lili, try!"

But Lili begged pitifully, "You go, Beth, I can't. Stand in for me just once more. It'll be the last time I'll ever ask a favor of you."

Frenzied with despair, Beth cried, "Yes, Lili, it well may be the last time!" She snatched up the green coat and the dark glasses and raced down the stairs instructing Mattie on the way to tell anyone who phoned that Lili was at the hospital.

Beth never knew how she got there or how she drove the car without crashing into something. As she pulled up to the door, she was surrounded by reporters and photographers.

Mercifully, Clark Case appeared and cleared a path for her. "Haven't you guys any hearts at all? Let her alone!" He guided Beth into the hospital, still unaware she was not Lili. Beth had her face buried in the hood of Lili's coat.

Clark said in a low tone, "You've got to be brave, Lili. It's pretty bad. Concussion. They won't know for twenty four hours if he'll make it. You can't see him but I've told the doctor we'll wait here until we know. He insisted we stay in his private office. It's right here."

Clark opened a door and Beth entered. As he closed it he said admiringly, "Your courage is superb, Lili. I had no idea—"

"I'm not Lili!" Beth cried, unable to take any more. Dry sobs wracked her. She tried hard for control but it was impossible. She was conscious that the door opened and of Clark whispering to someone, then presently he gave her something to drink. It tasted salty and bitter but it quieted her and when he asked in a worried voice why Lili hadn't come, Beth told him about Breck.

She felt as if she'd grown old in those next hours while they waited. Finally the doctor came back to report, "He's conscious now. He'll make it, but we can't risk excitement of any sort. He must have absolute quiet for a long time, and no visitors. I hope you understand, Miss Jocelyn."

Beth nodded and as Clark took her arm and led her out of the hospital, cameras clicked at her from all sides. Clark drove her home. Mattie met them at the door, her face pale and drawn. "It's been awful, Miss Beth. She's been delirious all night. She finally quieted down when I called the hospital and found out that Mr. Duryea

was out of danger and that he would live."

"You didn't say you were phoning for Miss Jocelyn did you?" Clark asked in alarm.

"No, sir. I said I was a friend."

Beth turned away so that Clark wouldn't see the contempt in her eyes. She made no reply when Clark said, "Thanks a lot, Beth. You've been wonderful."

In her own room, Beth threw herself across the bed and fell into a troubled sleep. The next thing she knew she heard a voice in Lili's room evidently talking on the phone. It was Laura Winters. She was saying, "Miss Jocelyn cannot talk to anyone. She collapsed completely after her all night vigil at the hospital!"

Something snapped in Beth. She was conscious of laughing hysterically and being unable to stop; of wanting to start running and never stopping. She got up from the bed but a bottomless pit yawned before her.

WHEN SHE awoke Lili sat beside her, looking as she had always looked. Beth said, confused, "Your eye is all right, Lili! I thought—"

"That was ten days ago," Lili said gently. "You've been a very sick girl, Beth. You've scared me half to death."

Beth's mind was functioning clearly now. She asked, "How is Chan?"

"Coming along fine," Lilli said happily. "No one has been allowed to see him but he'll be home from the hospital soon and I'll be waiting there to greet him. Now you've got to get out of that bed and into the sunshine. You look like a little ghost. It's my turn to look after you and I mean to."

In the days that followed, Lili could not have been more devoted to Beth if she had been her sister. She sat long hours with her on the patio, while Beth soaked up sunshine and nourishing food. She made no attempt to fill in the ten-day void on news. But from scraps of conversation that Beth overheard when Lili talked on the phone, she knew Lili was refusing to start her new picture until Chan was out of the hospital. Nothing seemed to matter now but Chan.

Beth tried to put the bitterness out of her mind. She told herself that she had never really had Chan's love except for a few moments when he felt unsure of Lili. Now Lili would be waiting for him when he got home.

Three days later Beth was sitting on the patio. She had regained most of her honey tan and the sparkle in her eyes. She was intending to tell Lili that evening that she had decided to leave for New York on Sunday. She knew Lili would make no protest for she had suggested a vacation as soon as Beth felt up to it. Knowing Lili so well, Beth sensed she wanted her to go before Chan got out of the hospital.

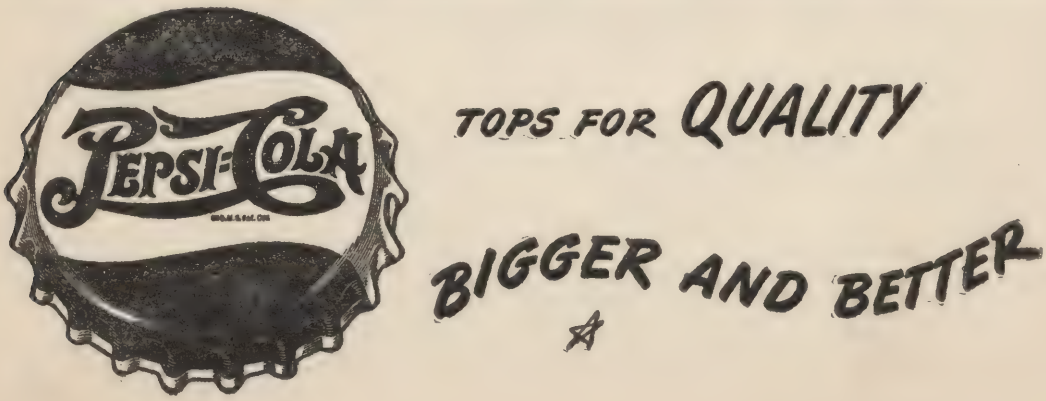
She had been trying to read but the words ran together, she put the book down, closed her eyes, then opened them quickly again as she heard a car in the driveway.

Her heart lurched violently as she heard Chan say, "I can make it alone, Bill. I've got to start sometime!"

Beth stood up, aware that she was trembling uncontrollably. He was thinner and very pale but his smile was quick and friendly. "Hello, Beth. Surprised to see me?"

"Surprised and glad," Beth said warmly.

The smile disappeared from Chan's face



as he said, "I had hundreds of messages while I was in the hospital but none from you. How come?"

Bright, angry color stained Beth's cheeks. She said, low, "I've been ill."

Just then, Lili appeared in the doorway. Her green eyes widened, then filled with tears as she gasped, "Chan, darling, is it really you?"

She rushed to him, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. "How could you spoil my surprise? They promised to phone me from the hospital when you would leave and I was going to be at your home waiting for you."

"I thought it would be a nicer surprise if I stopped off here first and told you how much I appreciate—"

Lili broke in hurriedly, "Come inside and sit down, darling. I've so much to say to you that I don't know where to start."

Beth sat down again in the beach chair. Chan and Lili went inside and Lili closed the French doors quietly behind her. Beth intended going to the rear of the house and up the back stairs to her room but somehow she could not move.

Another car came into the driveway and stopped with a shriek of brakes behind Chan's car. Breck Colton emerged from it. He said to Beth angrily, "Where is that two-timing little wench? She isn't satisfied kicking my heart around, but now she's trying to get me kicked out of pictures. But she's not going to get away with it!"

Beth stood squarely in his path trying to reason with him, fearful that Chan was not yet well enough for a scene, but it was no use. Breck pushed her roughly aside and threatened, "I've just one thing to say to that— "

The French doors opened, and Chan stood there, his face white and set. Breck stared at him in stupified surprise a moment; then he laughed harshly. "So you're the other sucker she's been taking for a ride! Well let me tell you something. Lili is a phony. All that stuff in the papers about her being at the hospital all night when you cracked up is the bunk. It was her stand-in here, the gal who covers up for her all the time."

Beth wondered why Chan just stood silently saying nothing and why Lili didn't appear. When Breck was silent a moment Chan asked in a cold voice, "Are you all through talking? I think you've said enough."

"Not yet," Breck rasped, his voice sober and even now. "I've got just one more thing to say and I'm saying it to Lili. Where is she?"

Chan stood aside and motioned Breck inside. Beth stared in numb bewilderment wondering how Lili would talk her way out of this. Suddenly she heard Breck laugh and shout, "So she took a powder. That's just like Lili, she can't take it. But this time she's going to. If she has me kicked out of her picture, I'll talk and talk plenty!"

An instant later, he came barging through the door, back to his car. Beth was about to leave the patio when Chan came out. She tried to hurry past him but he barred her way. His voice was low. "I owe you an apology, Beth. Will you accept it?"

Beth nodded. She dared not look at him. She rushed into the house, calling for Mattie frantically. When Mattie appeared, Beth asked, "Where did Miss Jocelyn go?"

Mattie shrugged. "The last I saw of her she was running out the back gate!"

Beth told Mattie she was leaving for New York at once and asked her to pack her clothes and ship them to American Express there.

She flew to New York and checked in at the Brenton, a small hotel in the East Fifties. She had a substantial bank account so she decided to take a rest before looking for another job. She had to have time to get her heart and mind adjusted to a new life.

Beth's feeling for Chan was a dull pain in her heart that only time would cure. The newspapers were full of the sudden disappearance of Lili Jocelyn but she didn't take it seriously.

It was a few days later that Beth read the headine: LILI JOCELYN, MOVIE STAR FOUND WANDERING IN BEVERLY HILLS, VICTIM OF AMNESIA. Beth thought contemptuously, Lili thinks of everything!

There was no word about Chan in the the papers until a couple of days later when Lili's manager gave out the statement that she had broken her engagement to Chan Duryea and would go away for a long rest before resuming her career in pictures. Chan refused comment of any sort.

(Please turn to page 98)

Words for Tomorrow

We shall not stand together
To see the sunlight fade,
Nor shall we walk together
In the path our years have made;
We shall not see on winter nights
The molten embers glow,
We shall not count the turning years
Nor reconcile the snow . . . .
And though I walk alone
The path that two should take,
I shall go with courage
Remembered for your sake,
And they who look at me shall see
The banner of your bravery.

by Vesta Crawford

"You've got it pretty soft," Val said teasingly, smiling at Jack.

Dark Valley

By CHARLES B. POSTL

Is heartbreak the price of loyalty when two brothers love one girl?

BENEATH THE simmering waves of the early afternoon sunshine lay the Venezuelan city like an impressionistic oil painting brightly splashed with color. But inside the dimly lit room whose balcony overlooked the twisting streets, the tiled roofs and the tropical gardens of Caracas, Barbara Dale waited tensely. Her fingers plucked nervously at the Chinese tassle that decorated the neckline of her

white silk dress. It felt cool on her body.

It wasn't going to be easy telling Jack Winters that she didn't love him, she realized helplessly. Hurting someone as fine as Jack would never be a simple matter. But there was no other way out. Despite her genuine fondness of him she had never dreamed that their friendship was developing into anything serious until yesterday.

The sound of footsteps hurrying down the tiled hall cut short her musings. When her bell rang she jumped up and opened the door. "Jack," she cried expectantly.

A tall, dark-haired stranger stood outside her apartment. He was wearing tan gabardine slacks, belted with a scarlet silk sash, and the gleaming white of his silk sport shirt made his sun-burned skin seem as dark as polished mahogany. His black hair was swept sleekly back from a high forehead. His steel-gray eyes appraised her coldly. His face wore a ruthless expression.

Startled, Barbara stepped backward, as if involuntarily seeking the shelter of her room. Then all at once a peculiar thing happened. It was almost as if the steady stare of his penetrating eyes had hypnotized her. She felt her body stiffen into immobility, and her heart began to throb in her throat. A tingling, electrifying current shot through her every nerve, making her weak and tremulous.

Then a cathedral bell abruptly chimed the hour, and its notes broke the strange spell. Barbara caught her breath and wondered bewilderedly what in the world had happened to her.

The stranger bowed stiffly. "No," he said briefly. "It's not Jack. I'm his brother, Van Winters."

There was something about the way he continued watching her that made Barbara suddenly afraid. "Is there—has anything happened?" she stammered.

He nodded curtly. "Yes. There's been an accident. Jack went hunting this morning and one of the party set off his gun while cleaning it. The bullet struck Jack's hip."

Barbara abruptly sat down on the couch, her eyes staring in shock. "Was he badly hurt?" she asked tensely, swallowing to ease the sudden lump in her throat.

He shrugged evasively. "We won't know how serious the damage is for a while. He's lost a lot of blood and the bullet tore into his hip joint which will take time to heal. Perhaps Jack has told you that we have established a clinic at White Cloud. By some miracle of fate it was Dr. Stromberg's scheduled day there. He'd driven out from Caracas early this morning. So when they carried Jack home he took x-rays to locate the bullet and then operated at once. When Jack woke from the anesthetic he was asking for you. I promised I would bring you out to White Cloud. Will you come?"

He spoke the last words as if he thought it were possible that Barbara would refuse. Across the shock that dulled her thinking she felt a prick of resentment. "Of course I'll come," she said with quiet dignity.

"Better pack some clothes then. Jack will probably insist on your staying a few days. That is if you can manage to get away from the Cafe."

"They are redecorating so it will be closed for a while. I shouldn't have been singing there this week anyway," she explained as she nervously got up and went into her bedroom.

As she began to pack her bag she felt as if she were acting in a play where the lines had been badly mishandled. Everything seemed strange and unreal. Jack, blond, eager-eyed, so full of the gay spirit of living! She couldn't imagine him lying still and hurt. Suddenly she remembered the possessive warmth of his lips against hers and a premonitory chill ran down her spine. If only she hadn't been so stupidly blind, she thought desperately, then she wouldn't be trapped like this.

The sound of a match being struck in the next room recalled her to unescapable reality, and with a little catch in her throat she forced her hands to finish their packing.

She couldn't consider her own feelings now, not with Jack ill and asking for her. She locked her bag and went into the other room. "I'm ready," she said simply.

Val Winters turned from the window where he had been staring down at the street below. For a fleeting second Barbara impatiently watched the brilliant tropical landscape flash by. During the first few moments of the drive she had tried to talk to Val, questioning him more about Jack's condition. But his answers had been so curt that she had quickly given up. Of

course Val would be terribly upset and worried about Jack but that was no reason for him to act like a sulky, rude schoolboy nor did it explain his obvious and deep distaste for her presence beside him in his low slung roadster, she told herself resentfully.

But finally thoughts of Jack's accident and the resulting awkwardness of her own predicament overcame her feeling of resentment at Val's behavior. Closing her eyes her thoughts slipped back to the day she had decided to come to Caracas. . . .

IT WAS back in Chicago, in her booking agent's office. She was listening intently as he said, "This offer is a swell chance for you to tour South America, Barbara. See how they operate in the cafes down there. You'll be able to get a lot of experience and it will help get you good bookings when you return. And the type of songs you do, intimate, husky-voiced, will go over big with the Latins."

His enthusiasm and the glamorous lure of travel had persuaded her to sign up for the tour, and she had excitedly studied the rough outline he had prepared of the trip, smiling eagerly at names like Caracas, Lima, Rio.

She had reached Caracas and had a very successful opening evening at the American Cafe. But as the days went on she found herself becoming lonely and homesick. After the first few weeks the thrill of sightseeing and exploring the quaint old town gradually dulled and in its place was left nothing but the long empty hours of the lulling, sun-washed days. She met people at the Cafe but she couldn't get used to stiffness of Spanish courtesy. She withdrew more and more within herself, waiting impatiently each long day for the brief hours when she sang at the Cafe. She wondered wryly why she had ever been so eager to sign up for the tour.

One evening, a young American-looking fellow smiled at her from across the candlelit dance floor of the American Cafe. When she returned his smile, he walked over to her table and introduced himself as Jack Winters. He was very blond and fresh-faced. He told her something of his work in Caracas, of his partnership with his brother Val in their huge pottery works. And he told her too, a great deal about White Cloud, his brother's beautiful home in the hills back of Caracas.

Barbara liked Jack and readily accepted his dates of gay afternoons at the Country Club swimming pool, or driving to quaint inns in the back country. He proved to be such an agreeable, gay companion that Barbara's homesickness and loneliness vanished completely.

She had told him almost as soon as they had met that she was leaving Caracas in a few weeks but she had never given a thought to what his continued attentions might mean. It had been enough for her that she had found someone gay and amusing to help her pass the long empty days until she would move on to Rio.

But yesterday afternoon, when he had driven her out to the Country Club, she had learned the truth in one blinding flash. They had been swimming in the pool when suddenly Barbara had been seized with a terrific cramp in her leg. For a minute the pain had blotted out everything else. As she struggled to keep afloat, she screamed aloud for Jack.

In a second he was beside her, holding her firmly as he towed her swiftly to the shallow end of the pool. "Are you all right?" he asked at last, his voice oddly strained.

"I'm all right now," Barbara gasped, trying to smile. She noticed how white his face had become beneath its tan. "Don't worry, Jack," she chided him, "I'm not going to faint."

For a second their glances locked and she was startled to see a strange glow in his eyes. Without warning his arms tightened their hold about her and he caught her to him. "Barbara," he said fiercely. "I'll never let anything happen to you, sweetheart. Swiftly he bent his head and his lips came down on her mouth, hungry and seeking.

At the first touch of his mouth, understanding flashed through her brain like lightning in a murky summer sky, and she had taken his insistent friendship for granted, not realizing the swift, deep love that motivated it.

She knew too that the loneliness that had prompted her to accept his attentions so enthusiastically had been to blame for this moment. But that didn't help her now. She must make him understand.

She twisted away from him. "Don't, Jack," she cried, distressed. "Please don't. I feel kind of shaky. Will you take me home now?"

He dropped his hands and his eyes softened. "Sure, honey, right away."

During the short drive back to her apartment she was quiet and pale. Silently she had been rehearsing the words she wanted to tell him. But when she opened her apartment door she found the orchestra leader of the American Cafe waiting for her in her living room.

"I am deeply sorry, *Señorita,* to bother you like this," he apologized, "but the new songs came on the plane this afternoon, and the manager of the Cafe would like you to sing some of them tonight, before we close for redecorating. Naturally I thought we had better go over them together." He pointed suggestively to the battered upright in the corner of the room.

Barbara nodded. "Of course," she said, keeping the sharp disappointment from her voice. "I'll be ready in a minute." Turning to Jack she told him gently. "I'm sorry, Jack, but it looks as if I'll have to get to work now. It will take a few hours. Will you come back tomorrow afternoon? There's something I want to talk to you about."

He caught her hands in his bronzed ones, raised them briefly to his lips. "Try and keep me away." He grinned. Then he turned and clattered down the stairs. As Barbara slipped off her hat and went over to the piano, she could hear him whistling gayly as he started his car.

NOW TOMORROW had come. But everything was so different from the way she had planned it. She hadn't been able to tell him that she didn't love him.

She sighed wearily and stole a glance at Val's profile. The wind had lifted a lock of his black hair and tumbled it onto his forehead. Despite the casualness of his appearance there was a grim set to his lips and an icy light in his eyes that made Barbara shiver. "Anyway," she told herself consolingly, "I'm glad it's Jack I've got to make understand instead of this cold, hard man."

When the car reached the top of a gray-hued hill, Val broke the silence. "That's White Cloud," he said, pointing.

Barbara stared curiously at the valley ahead of them. A two-storied white stone building stretched its proud length gracefully on a sweep of clipped lawn, like a sleek white cloud in a hollow of green velvet. Its balconies were carved and fretted, and the terrace that fronted the drive was a primitive blaze of color from the rows of potted hibiscus and flame vine that lined its edge.

Barbara caught her breath in surprised pleasure. "Oh," she murmured as Val sent the car spinning down the graveled drive, "It's the most beautiful home I've ever seen."

Val pulled the car up beneath the columned *porte cochere* and shut off the motor. Then he turned and looked at her as if her words had secretly amused him. "I didn't expect you to be quite so enthused," he told her succinctly.

Barbara bit her lips. Suddenly she had had quite enough of his arrogance. "Didn't you think my mind capable of appreciating beauty like this?" she asked witheringly.

Val shrugged negligently. "White Cloud speaks for itself," he said curtly. "But most women would forget its beauty when they realized how far away it is from the movies or the corner beauty parlor."

For just a second his eyes mockingly swept her face and Barbara felt as if they could read the very secrets of her soul. He opened the door for her and his hand was warm and strong on her arm as he helped her out of the car.

She stiffened beneath his touch and was infinitely glad when he released her. But when she followed his square, white clad shoulders into the house, she couldn't help thinking that his biting words had meant something more than they actually had said.

When her eyes grew accustomed to the dimness of the hall she saw that it was beautifully furnished with Spanish carved furniture and soft-toned oriental rugs. At one end of it was a grilled arch toward which Val was rapidly heading.

"This is our Clinic," he explained quickly. "We built it into one wing of the house." He went through the arch and tapped gently on a closed door. A tall, thin woman with iron-gray hair answered his knock. "How is he, Mrs. Carson?" he asked urgently.

The woman shook her head. "He has great pain, poor lad," she whispered, "and he's terribly weak. But the doctor said before he left that as soon as Mr. Jack sees the young lady, we're to give him something to make him sleep."

She turned to Barbara. "You're Miss Dale? You can go in now. You can only stay a minute. Please be careful not to excite him."

Feeling as if this were all part of some crazy dream, Barbara followed Val and Mrs. Carson into a bare, white-walled room. On a high iron bed in the corner, Jack lay still and pale. But immediately his pain-wracked eyes focused on her. "Barbara," he murmured gratefully.

"Don't talk, Jack," Val ordered kindly. "You've got to save your strength."

Jack managed a tired grin. "Thinks he can boss me around, Barb," he said. He reached eagerly for her hands as she bent over him. "You're going to stay aren't you?" he begged.

Barbara struggled with the tears that threatened her eyes. It was unbearable to find gay, vital Jack Winters so suddenly spent and helpless, so pathethically glad to see her. "Of course I'll stay," she promised huskily. "But you've got to promise to behave yourself. How about beginning by drinking this now." She reached for the sleeping draught that Mrs. Carson had just mixed. Carefully she brought the cup to his lips. Obediently he gulped down the milky mixture and made a wry face. "Some cocktail you fixed up," he protested weakly.

Barbara set the cup down and then smoothed back his crinkly, blond hair. "Try to sleep now," she told him soothingly, "and I'll be waiting for you."

For a moment he stared at her as if he were looking at her for the last time. Then slowly he shut his eyes and in an incredibly short time he was breathing quietly and deeply.

Barbara felt Mrs. Carson's hand on her arm, and noiselessly she followed her and Val into the hall.

"He'll sleep right through the night now," Mrs. Carson said quietly as she shut the door. "We were just waiting until you came to give him that. He insisted on seeing you first before he took anything to put him to sleep."

Barbara nodded. Suddenly she was too tired for words. The shock and strain seemed to have swooped down on her all in a minute.

As if understanding her need for rest and privacy, Val said abruptly, "Will you show Miss Dale to the Gold Room please, Mrs. Carson? I'll have one of the boys bring up her bag."

Mrs. Carson looked up, startled. "The Gold Room, sir?" Her voice sounded surprised, almost shocked.

"That's what I said," Val assured her bluntly as he searched in his pockets for a cigarette.

"Certainly. Will you follow me, Miss?" Quickly Mrs. Carson turned and started down the hall, her old-fashioned buttoned shoes squeaking protestingly at her rapid movements.

As Barbara followed her, she wondered what the odd look that had flashed between Mrs. Carson and Val had meant, and why the older woman should have been so surprised when Val suggested she put Barbara in the Gold Room.

When Mrs. Carson unlocked a door at

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the head of the winding stairs she turned and apologized to Barbara. "You'll have to excuse the appearance of the room," she said. "It's been locked up a long time."

Barbara nodded and entered a beautifully proportioned room decorated in a soft gray-green. The floor was covered with a large white fur rug, and at one end there was an ivory marble fireplace flanked by a chaise lounge. The furniture was all of delicate French design, gilded in pink gold, but dust covers hid the exquisite beauty of the petit point upholstering. From a half opened door beyond Barbara caught a glimpse of a gleaming pink-tiled bath.

Mrs. Carson quickly began jerking off the dust sheets. "I'll send a maid up here to make this presentable for you," she promised. "In the meantime maybe you'd like a bath. Here's the wardrobe." She switched on twinkling lights in the bath and flung open the door of a huge closet.

"Thank you," Barbara murmured wearily as she slipped off her jacket and hung it in the closet. As she wandered over to the shuttered window she suddenly felt a disturbing sense of mystery about the beautiful room and she wondered fleetingly why it had been locked up so long. "Don't you ever use this room?" she couldn't help asking as Mrs. Carson started for the door.

Mrs. Carson paused for a moment. She flashed Barbara a hostile look. "We don't have many visitors at White Cloud," she muttered evasively as she slipped out the door.

BATHED AND relaxed Barbara sat at the dressing table brushing her hair. In the mirror she saw a slim figure dressed in a smart violet dinner frock. Her hair which she had brushed into a gleaming cap of curls was darkly auburn like burnished copper. Her long-lashed eyes were deep purple and her red lips were warm and sensitive.

A dinner bell echoing throughout the house cut across her scrutiny. Quickly she stood up and slipped a pair of golden bracelets on her arm, sprayed a mist of perfume around the edge of her dress.

Mrs. Carson had assured her Jack would sleep through the night so she wouldn't see him again tonight. But she knew she would have to face Val at dinner. She had made a point of looking as coolly sophisticated as possible. She had thought it would be easier to cope with Val's aloof bitterness that way, his apparent dislike of her presence at White Cloud.

But he didn't resent her being here any more than she did, she told herself wryly as she went into the hall. It wasn't pleasant to stay where you obviously weren't wanted. But for Jack's sake she must see it through. When he grew stronger she would tell him the truth. Then she'd be free to leave White Cloud forever, forget the disconcerting disapproval in Val's gray eyes.

When she came down the winding stairs she found the lights were lit in the long drawing room and that a small table had been set for two.

Val was staring at the empty fireplace holding a cocktail glass in his bronzed hand. He looked up when she came into the room. For a fleeting second she saw his eyes change as if a veil had been snatched away to reveal an intensely masculine look of admiration that it went through her like projected energy.

Annoyed and shaken at her involuntary response she sat down to a meal of unmarred perfection. Val didn't bother to talk but concentrated on eating. His continued silence failed to mar Barbara's enjoyment of the meal and when she accepted a cigarette from his gold case, she commented appreciatively, "You certainly don't starve at White Cloud even if you live in the wilderness."

Val took a deep drag on his cigarette and blew the smoke from his nostrils. "My housekeeper, Mrs. Carson, is a gem," he said lightly.

"Your praise surprises me," Barbara countered dryly. "Somehow I rather thought you didn't approve of women."

He grinned at the sarcasm in her voice. "I don't. Mrs. Carson is the exception that proves the rule."

The man was impossible, Barbara told herself disgustedly. She simply couldn't dent his assurance. Impatiently she ground out her cigarette and stood up. "If you'll excuse me," she said haughtily, "I think I'll turn in now. I'm rather tired."

"Of course." He was on his feet picking up her handkerchief which had slipped to the floor. As he bent his broad-shouldered figure Barbara grudgingly had to admire

the swift, lithe grace of his movements. And as their fingers touched when he handed her the handkerchief she felt as if a charge of some strange burning emotion seared through her. "Thank you," she murmured, shaken, as she turned and hurried up the stairs.

The moonlight streamed steadily down on the terrace silhouetting the palm fronds against the cloudless sky, and turning the hibiscus blooms into black orchids. White Cloud was a beautiful strange place, Barbara reasoned silently as she gazed into the night, and despite her worry over Jack and the problem of knowing she must soon tell him, there was something about the atmosphere here that made her feel more alive and vibrant than she had ever felt before. But she wearied of watching the silent garden so she caught up a scarf and went into the hall. Despite what she had told Val, she was too restless and sleep was hours away. She decided on doing a little private exploring.

Descending the terrace steps she walked aimlessly down the garden path. The scent of a thousand flowers filled the night and she took grateful, deep breaths of the perfumed air. In the distance a low, sprawling building loomed in the moonlight and on a sudden she realized that it must be the pottery factory Val and Jack owned. Curiously she moved toward it, wishing it were daylight so she could see the quaint pieces being made. The drying sheds and the firing ovens stretched beyond the first closed building. As Barbara was wandering toward them, she abruptly bumped into Val, standing with his back toward her, in the shadow of the thatched roofs. She let out a startled cry and as she backed up, her high heel caught in a piece of loose stone flagging and she stumbled. Val whirled around quickly and shot his arms out, holding her tight and safe from the ground.

Gratefully she looked up to thank him but the words died on her lips. He was staring at her almost like a savage tiger. His lips had parted tensely and she could hear him breathe.

From some instinctive source a danger signal flashed into Barbara's mind. Quickly she tried to free herself from his grasp. But as if her struggles were the very spring that released the lock on his will power he swiftly caught her up in his arms. Then forcing her chin upward with his cupped palm, his mouth deliberately found hers and he kissed her lips with a force as dominant as his personality.

After a moment of futile struggling, Barbara weakly closed her eyes and clung to him. A flare of fire began to sweep over her consuming the very strength in her bones. The ground rocked beneath her and the world retreated into the dim distance. She felt as though she were falling into some deep, deep chasm where everything was a confused, frightening blur.

When at last he released her he stared down at her as if he were just emerging from an anesthetic. He dropped his hands and a look of utter loathing and horror crossed his face. "What have I done!" He muttered, backing quickly away as if she were some dangerous serpent. Then with a muttered oath he swung on his heel and was gone, vanishing quickly into the shadows of the night.

Alone, Barbara stood quivering and shaken, like a frightened fawn. Gingerly she raised her hands and rubbed her stinging lips. As reasoning returned a wild flash of outraged rebellion surged through her. "Who does he think he is, the—the big wolf," she stormed.

But as she stumbled on back to the house, her anger and resentment were overridden gradually by the piercing, humiliating knowledge that despite her struggles, after Val's first caress, she had involuntarily responded and kissed him back. And slowly her eyes filled with hot, shamed tears.

IN THE days that followed, Barbara felt rather as if she were a puppet motivated by some taut wire. She bathed, ate and slept, and then spent hours in Jack's room reading to him and amusing him, always purposely keeping the conversation away from anything serious. But there was a stiffness about everything that made her feel as if she were acting some prearranged role. And although Jack apparently was improving, her relief there was marred by the irritation of having to face Val every day.

For Val had never apologized for the moments when he had forced his kisses upon her. Instead he had drawn back even deeper into his shell, scarcely speaking

when they met. But despite his aloofness Barbara knew that he was always keenly aware of her presence. She could sense it in a dozen different ways: in the quick gleam of his eyes when she entered the room, in the too swift withdrawal of his fingers when their hands touched as he lighted her cigarette. And always she wondered irritably why that particular knowledge gave her such a strange sense of satisfaction.

Then one day she had her answer. Quickly, incredibly. Val stalked into Jack's bedroom one morning and found Barbara reading to Jack.

"Pretty soft," Val drawled teasingly. "And me slaving away at the office checking orders."

Jack grinned. "You look all in, old boy," he countered mockingly. But then suddenly his grin faded and his eyes went serious. "But I don't suppose it is much fun for Barbara cooped up here with me all the time. So why don't you take her to see the monastery today, Val? That would give her a change, and you could manage to get away that long. Get Mrs. Carson to pack you a lunch and let Barb ride Lady Bess."

Barbara closed the book she had been reading with a snap. Tensely she waited for Val's refusal when she heard him say, "Good idea. That is if you could manage without us that long."

"Go ahead. Mrs. Carson will give me all the care I need," Jack urged.

Scarcely able to believe her ears, Barbara looked up. After treating her like a necessary nuisance ever since she had come to White Cloud, Val now suddenly agreed to spending a whole day entertaining her. Proud, angry words of refusal were on her tongue when suddenly she shut her lips on them. Maybe it was the surprising excited look in Val's gray eyes fixed so steadily on hers that decided her. Or maybe it was the lulling buzz of the bees in the flower garden outside the opened window that stilled her resentment and anger. Barbara couldn't tell. She knew only that on a sudden she wanted to go with Val more than she had ever wanted to do anything before.

"That sounds like fun," she murmured helplessly, trying not to sound too eager to go.

THE BREEZE had quickened and as Barabara turned Lady Bess after Val's horse into the palm-lined drive, it caught up her short auburn curls and whipped them about her face. They passed under a stone arch and came abruptly into a flagged courtyard surrounded by the tumbling, cracked walls of a small chapel and the tiled roofed buildings of a monastery. The people of Caracas had long ago called it Seven Bells because of the seven golden bells that had once hung in the tower of the chapel.

Now the place lay tumbled and shattered, carpeted with a layer of encroaching jungle. Barbara dismounted and began to explore the ruins excitedly. "It's just like something out of a book," she said happily.

Tethering the horses and loosening the lunch basket Val nodded. "Yes, in its day it must have been a lovely place. But since the earth quake that completely ruined the place it's been left to sleep in the sun. Jack says," he added, laughing, "that all it needs is a romantic gypsy fellow to make it a perfect setting for an operetta."

Barbara turned away from the dark, damp entrance to the ruined chapel. Val had lifted the wicker basket onto his shoulder and was striding toward a little plot of grass beside one of the walls. As she watched him go she again marveled at the lean grace of his movements, and she realized that when he wanted to, he could be a most agreeable companion. Ever since they had left White Cloud this morning he had gradually shed his veneer of coldness until now there was scarcely any resemblance between this smiling gay fellow and the stern, grim-faced man she had first known.

Recalling his last words, an odd thought abruptly struck her. With his black hair gleaming in the sun, his lithe athletic figure garbed in whipcord jodhpurs which were belted with a scarlet sash, she couldn't imagine a more romantic figure than his against this age old setting. And inexplicably, as if a weight had suddenly been lifted from her heart she found herself relaxing, gradually filled with a deep sense of contentment and well being.

They ate their lunch in the shade of a spreading banyan tree, and afterward, Val lazily suggested that they stay a while. As Barbara repacked the wicker luncheon basket, he sat down on the green grass beside her and rested his head against a tree, his

eyes closed. When Barbara closed the lid of the basket she was suddenly conscious of his physical proximity. She stared down at his long still figure. Unconsciously she lifted her hand and stretched it toward him. Then a wave of color dyed her cheeks and she snatched her hand back. "What in the world is the matter with me," she asked herself scornfully.

Later, when the sun had begun to cast shadows on the crumbled brick walls, and they had explored every nook and cranny of Seven Bells, Val brought the horses around. As she mounted Lady Bess, Barbara had a feeling of sadness take hold of her. She knew that a lovely moment had ended. Fretfully she tried to shake off the disturbing emotion and then as she turned her horse around she screamed wildly, shrilly. "Val! Look out! Over your head!"

Val jerked back his head and looked up at the banyan tree. He sprang swiftly backward, running straight into the arched gateway just as an enormous black snake loosened its hold on the tree and dropped its writhing body into a coiled heap on the ground, at the precise spot when he had been standing. It lay for a moment as if stunned and then disappeared quickly under a crack in the wall.

Grinning, Val picked himself up from where he had fallen and brushed the dust off his breeches. "Whew," he cried thankfully. "Good thing you were up to some quick thinking, Barbara. That was a close one. Those fellows are dangerous and they mean business."

Barbara couldn't answer. Besides the icy fright that had frozen her lips, her heart was beating wildly, like some savage drum. She had difficulty breathing. In that one fleeting moment when Val had been in danger, the truth had been driven into her brain like the pounding in of a razor-edged nail. And suddenly, surely, she knew that she was in love with him.

It was crazy. It was unbelievable, and it simply couldn't have happened. But it did. And swiftly certain puzzling memories fitted into a perfect picture of understanding, the completion of a jig saw puzzle. The electric tension she had felt when she had first seen Val standing outside her hall. The shamed moments when his lips had claimed hers and she had blindly returned his kisses. They all added up now.

Across the chaotic thoughts that ran through her brain like a mill race she saw him staring at her oddly. He took a step toward her and then suddenly his eyes narrowed and he turned away. "We'd better get moving if we're going to make White Cloud before dark," he called back casually as he mounted his horse and started for the trail.

Obediently Barbara followed him, thankful to be out of range of his penetrating eyes. But as he rode on ahead without speaking or even looking back, she gradually realized as the minutes slipped by what his abrupt silence meant. He had given her this day, made himself agreeable simply to please Jack. But now his duty was over and he was tossing her right back where he had found her. She blinked her eyes to hold back the threatening tears. But she couldn't stop the aching, jagged pain in her heart as she realized helplessly that she was a fool to love a man whose only desire was to free himself of her presence.

The pottery workers were just leaving the factory for their homes across the road when Barbara and Val returned to White Cloud. They nodded smilingly at Barbara as she slipped off Lady Bess. Barbara returned their silent greetings and then turned to Val who had beckoned to one of the yard boys to take the horses. "Thanks," she said evenly, managing somehow to keep the ragged edge from her voice. "Thanks for a lovely day."

The setting sun etched Val's profile against the sky as he stood waiting for the man who had answered his call. For a second his mouth seemed to soften and a poignant light glowed in his eyes. Then the native man took the horses from him and his face set once more into a mask of disinterested aloofness. "Forget it," he said negligently as he started for the factory.

WATCHING HIM stalk away Barbara wondered brokenly just how someone you loved so dearly could hurt you so terribly. Then slowly she turned and walked toward the house.

Mrs. Carson met her just inside the hall. "Mr. Jack wants to see you as soon as you return," she told Barbara disapprovingly.

Barbara nodded and started toward Jack's room in the Clinic. She wondered wryly as she slipped through the grilled

arch just why Mrs. Carson too disapproved of her so very much.

Jack greeted her eagerly, but she thought there was a new, restless glint in his eyes. "Did you have a nice time?" he asked quickly.

"Very nice," Barbara assured him as she sat down in the bedside chair. "It's a lovely place."

Jack plucked fretfully at the starched coverlet. "We have visitors at White Cloud," he said at last. "Dr. King, the famous California bone specialist, is in Caracas on a vacation visit. Dr. Stromberg knows him well and brought him down to have a look at my leg." He spoke hesitantly, as if he were trying to recall a piece he had previously memorized, and Barbara felt a stab of fear.

"Why? Is there anything wrong? I thought you were improving so splendidly."

Jack laughed aside her sudden fears. "No, there's not a thing wrong," he assured her heartily. "Dr. King took some X-rays though just to make sure. But he tells me I'll be up and about as good as new in a few weeks."

"Oh, Jack, I'm so glad." Relief warmed the sudden coldness that had chilled her body. She stretched her tired legs and looked up. He was staring at her steadily, a keen light in his blue eyes, and abruptly she realized that she couldn't go on like this. Now that his health was assured, she must tell him the truth. "Jack," she began nervously, "I told you at my house that there was something I wanted to tell you and now that you're almost well again—"

"Don't, Barbara." His voice was gentle, as if he were speaking to a little child. "There's nothing you can tell me that I don't already know. You've already told me in a dozen different ways. By your purposely keeping your chair away from me so that I couldn't touch or kiss you. In your always laughing aside my attempts to discuss what I once thought we could mean to each other." His voice broke huskily but he went quietly on. "And by the constant dark shadow of unhappiness in your eyes. Barbara, didn't you know I loved you too well not to realize that you don't feel the same about me?"

As if hypnotized, Barbara stared at his drawn face. Then suddenly she couldn't bear it another moment. She knew now just what it meant to love someone who didn't care. A little sob escaped her clenched teeth and she buried her head in her hands. "I'm so sorry—so terribly sorry," she whispered. "I never meant for you to care."

She didn't see the longing, hopeless expression that twisted his face, but his words came across the falling darkness. "Don't, Barbara," he said softly. "It's not your fault. None of us can govern our hearts."

In the pregnant silence that followed his words, the darkness was suddenly split by the abrupt switching on of the ceiling light. Barbara jerked up her head and blinked. Mrs. Carson stood in the doorway with a steaming dinner tray in her hands. "Dr. Stromberg and Dr. King are staying over night," she told Barbara stiffly. "So I've set dinner back an hour. Thought that would give you and Mr. Val time to dress."

Barbara nodded and got up. "Thanks," she murmured dully. Then turning to Jack she said, "I'll be leaving White Cloud early tomorrow, Jack. It's better that I go now. But I'll come in to see you again before I leave."

For one unwavering second he watched her white face. Then slowly he shook his head. "No, better make this good-by now, Barb," he muttered decisively.

The dishes clinked softly as Mrs. Carson arranged them on the dining table and wheeled it over to the bed. But there was something strangely final in the sound, like the clicking of a gate. And as the choking lump in Barbara's throat shut off her words and she walked silently out of the room she knew that she would never forget that particular moment if she lived a thousand years.

Barbara cleared the dressing table and packed her bag preparatory to leaving White Cloud. As her fingers searched in the drawer to see if she had overlooked anything, she felt once again that strange sense of brooding that tinged the atmosphere of the Gold Room. It was almost as if her presence here hadn't mattered at all and that the room was only waiting for its real owner. For a moment she wondered curiously why the room had been kept locked. Then fretfully shaking off these speculative thoughts she finished dressing for dinner.

It wasn't going to be easy to face Val tonight, but the presence of the doctors might help. Tomorrow she would be gone from White Cloud and she would never see him again. So even if these ceaseless, jagged pains were splitting her heart open, she knew she must have these last few hours with him to treasure and remember for always.

As she clipped tiny rhinestone butterflies on her ears she was thankful that Jack had made it as easy as possible for her. But she knew she would always be haunted by the pain in his eyes.

Recalling those hurtful moments, an odd thought suddenly struck her. Val thought she was still in love with Jack! She sat down abruptly and began to breath rapidly. What if she were to explain the whole thing to him, make him understand that she didn't love Jack but that she had been trapped by his accident into coming here! Then would she be able to break through his icy wall of reserve?

She caught her hands together to still their trembling. Surely his love was worth fighting for, she told herself bravely. Turning, she stared at her reflection in the glass and laughed a wild, daring laugh. Then quickly before she lost courage she got up and went over to the door.

SHE MOVED quietly toward Val's rooms and knocked timidly on his door. He opened it almost at once, and Barbara saw he was dressed in a blue silk dressing gown.

"Barbara!" he cried, obviously surprised. "Did you want something?"

She nodded. "Yes. Mrs. Carson told me the doctors were staying for dinner and as I wanted to talk to you for a few moments alone I thought I'd better see you now." She hoped desperately that her voice didn't betray the pounding of her pulse and the nervous tightness that was freezing her spine.

He swung back the door and switched on a lamp. "Okay," he said quietly. "Come inside."

Shyly Barbara walked into the room with its massive carved desk and its walls lined with books. From a half opened door beyond she caught a glimpse of his bedroom, now shuttered and dark. Then aware that he was watching her speculatively, she turned and faced him squarely, eyes meeting.

"I wanted to tell you that I'm leaving White Cloud tomorrow," she began hesitantly but his harsh quick laughter stopped her dead.

"Well, you didn't expect that to surprise me, did you?" His lips were mocking, his eyes two points of ice.

"I don't know what you mean."

He laughed again, a dry, mirthless laugh that cut through her like a saw. "Cut the acting, Barbara. This isn't the Cafe, you know." He strode over to a chest of drawers and poured himself a drink. The glass made a grating sound on the tray when he set it back. He swung around and faced her across the lamplight. "As soon as I heard Dr. King's decision that Jack must have another operation on his hip I knew you'd be leaving."

Another operation! The words pounded like hail into her brain. "Val," she cried shrilly. "Please! I don't know what you're talking about. Jack just told me he was fine. That's why I felt it was all right to tell him that I had never loved him—that it had all been a mistake—"

"Sure," he mocked roughly. "Do you know any more fairy tales?"

Frantically she caught at his arm. "Don't, Val, please," she begged piteously. "You've got to believe me. I didn't know. Jack didn't tell me the truth."

The scoffing disbelief in his eyes stopped her and her words trailed lamely into the air.

He drew back his lips in a taunting sneer. "So you're just a poor little lady in the dark. That's rather a new line, Miss Dale."

She passed her hand over her blurred eyes. This wasn't real. This was some horrible nightmare, she told herself wildly. But then Val's hands suddenly grasping her shoulders assured her that it was no crazy dream. It was horrible, unbelievable reality.

Dazedly she looked up. His face was close to hers, his breath warm on her cheek. Without warning he pulled her to him. "But you didn't come here now to discuss Jack, did you," he muttered. "You came to make a play for me. With the X-rays showing the beginning of calcification in Jack's shattered hip joint and another operation imperative, he was too great a risk. No telling just how badly he'll be

crippled. That makes me the better catch, doesn't it?"

She shivered beneath his words and then frantically summoned all her strength to twist away from his grasp. But she was like a fluff of cotton caught in a steel vise, and with a bitter laugh he held her closer and bent his head. Then his lips came down on hers brutually, punishingly.

For a moment everything went mercifully blank, but when he abruptly released her she backed away from him as if he were a tongue of fire. Sickeningly she knew it was no use. She would be a fool to try and explain further because she could never break through the insane, frozen wall of bitterness he had erected between them. Then as strength flowed back into her shaking limbs she turned and ran blindly back to her room.

When the dinner bell rang Barbara was seated before her open window unseeingly staring out at the night. The searing, white-hot flame of pain that had tortured her at first was gone now. In its place was a dull, steady ache and a stupid sense of having every nerve in her body temporarily stunned, as if she had taken an anesthetic.

She realized now that Jack had kept Dr. King's disheartening verdict from her because he had had too much pride to bind her to him by mere sympathy. She was deeply grateful and touched by his kindness, but she loathed herself for the additional pain she had brought to him. And remembering Jack's always cheery report on his condition, she knew at last that he had been merely sparing her.

Across the sincere sympathy she felt for him she was conscious of only one real desire: To leave White Cloud as quickly as possible so she would never have to face Val Winters again. She was through with explanations and apologies. What difference did it make what he thought of her? Not when his eyes were filled with cool contempt whenever he looked at her.

A knock on her door cut through her musings. Mrs. Carson came in in answer to her call. "Didn't you hear the dinner bell?" she demanded curtly. "The guests are waiting."

Barbara shrugged wearily. "I'm not coming down. I'm not hungry. Tell them to go on without me."

"Very well," Mrs. Carson started for the door, a look of resentment on her face.

"Wait!" Barbara's abrupt cry halted her and she swung around.

"I'd like to leave White Cloud as quickly as possible," Barbara told her nervously.

Mrs. Carson set her lips. "The doctors will be driving in to Caracas early tomorrow morning. I'm sure they'll be glad to take you."

"But I want to leave tonight. Couldn't you have someone drive me in?"

Mrs. Carson watched her speculatively. "I'm driving in to Caracas in a little while," she said at last unwillingly. "You could ride with me. That is if you don't mind riding in a truck with a load of vegetables," she added tauntingly.

"No. Of course not. I'll be ready whenever you say." Barbara caught at the chance, ignoring the sarcasm in Mrs. Carson's voice.

TWO HOURS later she was riding beside Mrs. Carson's straight, lean figure as the older woman expertly sent the small open truck around the hills that led down to Caracas.

Mrs. Carson didn't bother to talk, but Barbara didn't mind. She didn't even notice the jolting and the bumps. The only thing that mattered was that she was escaping from White Cloud.

When they reached the outskirts of Caracas, Mrs. Carson slid the car to a stop before a white walled group of buildings. "This is the orphanage," she exclaimed briefly. "I'll unload these things here now so I won't have to drive you through town with them." Quickly she began to carry in the baskets of vegetables that had been grown at White Cloud. When she finished, she climbed back into her seat and started the car.

Idly Barbara asked, "Do you always donate food to the orphanage."

Mrs. Carson nodded. "Yes," she said crisply. "Not only food and clothing but time, too. They are desperately short of help now, with the factories paying higher wages to the girls. That's why I've come in tonight. I'm going to return there and stay over a few days to give them a hand. After hearing about Mr. Jack's bad news I thought at first I wouldn't come, that he needed me more. But he insisted that I go anyway. He said he'd be all right with one

of the boys to care for him. Of course I'll go back as soon as Dr. King decides to operate."

In a few minutes they reached Barbara's apartment and as she climbed out the truck and started up the stairs, she gratefully called a second good-by to Mrs. Carson. But the older woman had already driven away.

The apartment seemed strange and empty when Barbara let herself in. There were some letters slipped under the door. She slipped off her coat and went over to her desk. Among the mail was a telegram from her booking agent. Slitting open the envelope, she read the brief page:

Am sending down to Caracas a small revue to open at the newly decorated American Cafe Wednesday and I'd like to book you at the Patio in Rio to open on Thursday evening, next week. Wire me if okay and you can make connections.

Surprised, Barbara considered the details she would have to attend to immediately if she were to accept the offer. The new songs she must rehearse. The checking over of her costumes. The scramble for plane reservations. Then the excitement and tenseness of opening night in a new place, the unfamiliar faces watching her critically, the struggle to put herself across. Abruptly she knew she couldn't do it. That her heart wouldn't be in it.

She should never have made this tour in the first place, she mused regretfully. She wasn't a real trouper because her career wasn't that important to her. Her whole world was centered now in a tall square-shouldered man with a sweep of black hair and a pair of intense gray eyes.

She was lucky she had inserted that cancellation clause in her contract. She would wire her agent tomorrow and tell him she was coming home. Home! The word tugged at her heart, but then sadly she realized she couldn't go back now. Not with everyone wondering and asking about her return. Not with her heart eternally aching behind the bright smile she would have to present to her family and friends.

If only I could do something worthwhile, where I'd really be needed, she told herself desperately. Abruptly, without knowing why, she thought of Mrs. Carson and the orphanage. Mrs. Carson had said they were desperately in need of help there. Like a magic talisman pulling her out of a deep pit, she seized upon the idea eagerly. Maybe she could help them for a while. Do small chores that would give the trained assistants more time for their special duties. She had taken that special home nursing training during the war! The very idea was like soothing balm on her tortured mind and she felt her spirits rise. Without stopping to reason further or consider Mrs. Carson's obvious dislike of her, she ran over to the door. Her high heels tapped briskly down the street as she searched for a taxi to take her to the orphanage.

The morning sunshine was slanting in through the venetian blinds when Barbara finished her packing and set the apartment in perfect order for its next tenant. She stretched her tired back and glanced at the clock on the desk. Mrs. Carson would be coming for her any minute now, she thought.

It hadn't been easy humbling herself before Mrs. Carson last night, and the older woman's succinct, "This orphanage isn't a play house, Miss Dale, and you won't find

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a starring part here," hadn't been easy to swallow. But in the end her insistence and the fact that the volunteer worker's board was always open to new members had won out, and Mrs. Carson had reluctantly agreed to give her a trial. And now she was impatiently waiting for the moment when she would be safely hidden behind those high white walls, her hands too busy with endless chores to permit her mind to think.

WHEN THE bell rang she hurried to open the door. She stiffened as if she had been drenched with a bucket of ice water.

Val Winters was staring at her from the hall, just as he had done that afternoon so long ago.

"Val!" she whispered, wondering if she were only imagining this.

"Barbara." He came swiftly into the room and shut the door. "I had to see you again because I owe you an apology." He cleared his throat and went quickly on. "When you came to my room last night I had just learned from Mrs. Carson that you had seen Jack and that you were leaving White Cloud. Like a damned hot-head I thought you were throwing Jack over because of Dr. King's disappointing verdict. And well, because I love Jack and didn't want his life smashed, I hated you for it. I wanted to pay you back."

His face flooded with color beneath its tan. "But right afterward Jack called me to tell me that he had fibbed about his condition to you. He told me that he couldn't stand your hanging around out of sheer sympathy when he knew he didn't have your love."

His voice broke huskily. "So my accusations were all wrong, Barbara, and I beg you now to please forgive me."

Barbara swallowed convulsively as her heart thudded in her throat. "Of course I forgive you, Val," she managed at last. "You just didn't understand. Please forget all about it."

A look of infinite relief flashed across his face. Then he noticed her packed bags. "You're leaving?" he questioned abruptly.

Barbara shook her head. "Not Caracas. Just this apartment. I'm going to help out at the orphanage for a few weeks. Mrs. Carson is putting me on their volunteer staff."

He jerked back his head in surprise. "The orphanage! But what about your singing at the Cafe?"

"They're sending out a new unit to reopen the Cafe and they wanted me to go on to Rio. I've decided to cancel my tour."

He was staring at her oddly and Barbara flushed beneath his intense scrutiny.

"What made you decide to quit," he demanded sternly.

Barbara strove desperately to think of some evasive answer but somehow she couldn't find the words. He took an eager step forward and his hands swung her slowly about. "I asked you a question, Barbara," he insisted.

She tried to free herself from his grasp but his fingers only tightened their hold. Helplessly she looked up and bright, telltale color dyed her cheeks scarlet. With a shamed sob she turned her blurred eyes away from his searching ones. But then almost at once she looked back. Val was laughing softly as he caught her to him.

"Val, Val," she cried protestingly.

"Oh, my sweetheart," he murmured tenderly. "Barbara what a fool I've been." His voice broke huskily. "My dearest, I've loved you from the very first moment I saw you standing here. But I thought you belonged to Jack so I wouldn't let myself care. I even made myself believe that Jack was making a wretched mistake in loving you. The same mistake I had made."

He caught her two hands in his and rubbed them against his cheek, like a little boy suddenly filled with remorse. "You see, darling, when I first came to Caracas I fell in love with a ballet dancer at the Opera House. I thought she was everything a woman could be and I spent everything I had on making White Cloud a fitting background for her—even had a decorator from Paris furnish and design the Gold Room, just for her. But then a week before we were to have been married, a talent scout from Hollywood came down here and spotted her. He offered her a contract, and overnight she calmly forgot all about me and packed her bags. For a while I thought I'd go berserk. I hated everything. Then along came the war and after enlisting, I did some flying over Europe. That wiped her completely out of my mind and set me straight. When the whole crazy fight was

(Please turn to page 97)

SIMILE

Upon the ocean, high waves spring
Like playful mountains leaping,
Yet under this, its silent depths
In quiet peace are sleeping.

My love for you is like the sea.
Your kiss brings mad excitement
But in your arms, I also found
What peace and deep delight meant.

by Celia Keegan

My Kind Of Girl

By MILLARD CROWN

Doug had all the money and success he wanted. All he needed now was the right kind of girl to share it with.

DOUG sat behind the desk, looking at a newspaper. His deep-set brown eyes gleamed with satisfaction and his warm full lips were curved into a happy smile, as he stared at the photograph of the beautiful girl. Slowly he read the copy below it:

Mr. and Mrs. Henry P. Winton of this city will announce the engagement of their daughter Helena to Douglas Carmody, at a reception tonight. Miss Winton graduated from the Mary Fenn School for Girls and was introduced to society at a supper dance last winter. She is a member of the Junior League. Mr. Carmody is president of the Modern Plastics Company.

Doug had to laugh aloud as he read the last line. He couldn't help composing in his mind what it should have read however. Words like: "Mr. Carmody ran away from St. Mary's Orphan Asylum at the age of fourteen and was introduced to the world without any suppers not to say anything of dances. He graduated from the School of Experience and Hard Knocks as well as the Army, until he got a break with the Modern Plastic Company. Prior to that he had been a newsboy, busboy, truck driver, carnival barker, and factory hand—"

He suddenly heard Helena's voice saying to him, as she had so many times, "You must forget what you have been, Douglas, and concentrate on what you can be."

A very wise philosophy, Doug admitted, but not one entirely new to him. He could still feel the sting of the cold night air whipping about him as it had when he was a kid and had stood in front of theaters, the soles of his shoes thinner than the newspapers under his arm. He remembered the smartly dressed men and women coming out, laughing gayly. He had decided then that someday he would be one of them.

He had always had a flare for inventions and after the war he developed a new formula for plastics. He went into business, and his drive and initiative developed his company to heights which he had never expected.

He met Helena Winton at a dinner party given by one of his business associates. When he saw her he had a flashing recollection of that theater crowd, and the hopes of the shivering little newsboy. He had

He saw her face turn white. "No, Doug, it isn't true," she cried.

stared with wide-eyed admiration, at the golden sheen of her hair, her wide set purple-blue eyes, and her delicate features. She wore shimmering white satin that set off her supple figure. If the whole effect of her beauty was slightly cold, Doug didn't notice it. Like snow in the sun, it was dazzling.

"Gosh, you're a knock-out!" he said unbashedly.

At first she was slightly condescending. "You have an amusing way of expressing yourself, Mr. Carmody."

He could take it. He lacked polish he knew, and that was exactly why he needed a girl like Helena.

He pursued her with the same zeal that had carried the Modern Plastics Company to such success. There was nothing subtle about a standing order of two dozen roses from the florist every day, or repeated invitations to wine and dine at the most expensive nightspots. Nothing subtle, but even to someone like Helena, it was pretty irresistible. They had fun together, too, going to all the places he had never been able to afford before.

"I'm sorry," Helena said to his first proposal a few weeks later. "I can't marry you, Mr. Carmody."

"You could call me Doug, though, couldn't you?"

"Very well. I'm sorry but I just couldn't marry you, Doug—Douglas."

He knew better than to be dejected by a first refusal. And several things finally made Helena change her mind. He was certainly more vital and better looking than most boys of her set. His technique of kissing her was definitely exciting. And last of all, something which she neglected to tell Doug, her father's business investments were in a bad way. She had to make a good marriage to go on living in a manner to which she was accustomed and hated to give up.

Finally she had accepted him. He knew they would be happy together and he arrived for his engagement reception at that in high spirits. He hadn't seen Helena all day because she was busy attending to last minute details for the affair. He was annoyed that the butler asked him for his invitation when he entered the brilliantly lighted foyer of the Winton home. "I'm the groom-to-be," he said, annoyed, searching for Helena, his eyes anxious to see her.

"Hello beautiful!" He saw her coming through the living room doorway. She wore a gown of chartreuse, girdled with a jeweled belt. He started to put his arm around her but she did not return his smile. Her eyes narrowed, scrutinizing his appearance from his gleaming dark hair to his feet.

"Douglas, you're wearing that dinner jacket with the shiny satin lapels again!"

He glanced down at his perfect fitting evening clothes. "Am I? I guess my other is at the cleaners. But honestly, Helena, only the other day I read that shiny lapels are all right. I meant to cut the article out to show you—"

"They're all right," Helena went on in her carefully, modulated voice, "but not preferable. And what in the world have you on your hair to make it shine so?"

Doug grinned again, running his lean hand through his luxuriant hair. "Something my barber recommended." He leaned forward. "Smell it!"

Her delicate nostrils quivered in repugnance. "Really, Douglas, sometimes I wonder why I'm marrying you!"

"Couldn't it be because you love me?" He held her close to him now.

His happiness was contagious. She looked even more beautiful as she smiled in spite of herself. She clung to him and returned the ardor of his kiss in a way that made him feel sure they would be happy, once he got her away from her family.

Helena's mother, a white-haired distinguished looking woman, interrupted them. "Helena—Doug! Stop that nonsense! Guests will be arriving any minute. You've got to come inside."

THIS reception business was pretty silly, he decided as guests began to arrive. Once he would have thought it wonderful to meet these people. Now he just wanted to be alone with Helena. He should have persuaded her to elope with him.

"Here's Bob Nelson!" Helena suddenly exclaimed. Doug felt her hand tighten on his arm. "I've known Bob for years. We've always been like brother and sister. His father and mine were in business together. You've heard me talk about him, Doug. I'm sure you'll like him."

Helena introduced a blond, good-looking man. Doug couldn't help noticing the dull finish of his lapels.

"I'm to be congratulated, too," Bob smiled at Helena. There was something odd about that smile, it was a little too forced, too happy. "You're not the only one who's become engaged. I want you to meet my fiancée, Miss Lillian West," he said, putting his arm around the girl beside him.

Doug was aware of Helena looking at the girl with that 'Now what can I find wrong with you' expression she had focused on him earlier in the evening. He could almost follow her mental check-up. Too much make-up on those full, curving lips. Dress so expensive looking it flaunted its price tag. Hair comb, too theatrical. Maybe, Doug mused. But according to his taste, Miss Lillian West was very much all right. Not that she could hold a candle to Helena, of course. She was a different type entirely. He liked her dark hair which she wore in a page boy bob. And her golden dress revealed a perfect figure. But it was her smile that won him over. It seemed so fresh, so unaffected, particularly when she said, "I'm always glad to meet any of Bob's friends."

Helena seemed a bit taken back by it all. "This is a surprise, Bob!" Bob laughed. "It hit us like a thunderbolt." The music began then and he turned to Lillian. "Shall we dance?"

"Let's dance, too?" Doug suggested as the other couple moved away.

"All right." Helena stared after Bob and Lillian. "I think everyone has arrived."

"Happy, darling?" Helena suddenly smiled up at him. He stared into her magnificent blue eyes, at those exquisite features.

He nodded. "Happiest man in the world, darling."

Her eyes glanced across the floor again. "I think it's mean of Bob to steal our thunder. Look, he's introducing his fiancée to everyone."

"Well, there are enough people here to take care of two engagements." He followed her glance.

"She doesn't look like the kind of person I thought Bob would ever marry. Lillian West—I never heard of her before."

"Bob probably thinks the same thing about me. He had never heard of me before."

Her eyes lit with sudden inspiration. "Do you know what I'm going to do darling. I'm going to ask Bob to propose you to his club."

"Club? What do you mean?"

"It's the Fifth Avenue Athletic Club. You'd make wonderful contacts there. And they give marvelous affairs—"

"Well, let's not worry about that now, honey," he said. "I hardly have time for that sort of thing. The factory keeps me busy enough."

The dance came to an end and he saw Bob and Lillian coming toward them. "Don't you think we ought to change partners for the next dance?" Bob said.

"Of course!" There was nothing else he could say, although he would have preferred to danced with Helena all evening. But she was in Bob's arms already and he held his out to Lillian.

This girl could dance; he could tell that immediately by the effortless grace of her body, the way her feet followed his.

He stared down at her oval face, her full rich lips. "You look awfully familiar to me," he said. "Haven't I met you some where before?"

"You look familiar to me, too," she laughed gayly. "But I don't usually travel in this set."

"Neither do I. I'm a hard-working young man."

"Really?" Her eye brows rose suspiciously. "I didn't know there were any of them in places like this."

He was about to say, "Don't judge the world by your Bob," but checked the impulse. He said instead, "You'd be surprised!"

The orchestra quickened its tempo. He felt Lillian's feet shuffle curiously. He wasn't quite sure but hesitantly asked, "Was that a little bit of the Lindy Hop you slipped in there?"

She bit her underlip and smiling confessed, "You weren't suppose to notice that. But that last note really sent me."

Without a word, he guided her out of the chaste ballroom to the terrace out doors. The air was a bit too cool for anyone else to come out here, so they were alone. Here they could dance, undisturbed.

Lillian could dance, too! He swung her

to him, swung her from him, and her feet followed every intricate move of his. There was a bright moon above and in its radiance he could see her glistening lips breathlessly parted, her dark eyes shining brightly. When the music stopped she was laughing breathlessly.

"Helena would say my conduct was unbecoming to a gentleman," Doug couldn't help commenting.

"And Bob!" she laughed again. "He'd lock me in a dark closet!"

With a sudden flash of inspiration he realized that he had never met her before; it was just that she was his kind of person!

He moved close to her. "You're not really—" Then he hesitated.

"Not really what?" she asked with a quizzical smile.

"One of them." He motioned toward the French door, indicating the crowd beyond.

She brushed her hair back from her shoulders, holding her chin high. "Now don't tell me I'm not a lady. I've been trying so hard!"

His eyes twinkled. She was all right. "You're in the same boat I am!"

"Boat? I feel as if I'm rocking from that dance," she laughed. "Where's our boat bound for?"

"The Social Register, I guess." He hesitated again. "But Bob? He doesn't seem your type at all."

Her cheeks flamed with color. "Why Helena?" she shot back at him. "She doesn't seem quite your type either."

"Okay." He grinned. "I'll confess all. Helena's a swell girl, when you get to know her." Then suddenly he found himself telling her all that had happened to him in life, his hopes and ambitions and to someday reach the top.

He was aware of her eyes staring raptly at him as he spoke. When he finished she said, "My climb wasn't so far. Have you ever heard of West's Cheese?"

He nodded. "I think I've read ads about it. 'West is Best' or something like that."

"That's right," she said, her eyes serious, "Well, I'm West Cheese. Lillian West. The cheese began in a grocery store and so did I. Mom used to make it, Pop sold it and I delivered it on my bicycle. The demand grew into twenty four kinds of cheese as a neon sign on Broadway will tell you." She paused a moment. "We moved from a flat behind the grocery store to an estate on Long Island. I went to the best schools, but—well to put it bluntly, I couldn't get rid of the cheese. The kids called me 'Cheese-it' and teased me about it continually. Maybe I'd have gotten along better if I had laughed it off, but kids aren't always able to do that. My mother had social ambitions too, but never quite made the grade. I never liked any of these society playboys much until Bob came along. He has a swell sense of humor. Marriage to him would be an entree to this set."

"I see," he said softly. What right had he to judge her actions when they weren't much different than his? They were two people who knew what they wanted in life. "I hope you'll be very happy, Miss West."

"I hope you'll be happy, too, Mr. Carmody!"

They stood there staring at each other, until a voice broke in, "There you are! We've been looking all over for you two," It was Helena, followed by Bob.

"I'm sorry," Doug turned to Helena. Did she look thinner, paler from the ordeal of the party or was he just imagining it? "Lillian and I were just talking."

"Well, it isn't nice to disappear with a strange young lady at your own engagement reception. Come along." She linked her arm through his, and lead him back to the party.

THE following week seemed an endless one to him. It was hard to do justice to his work and go out with Helena every night. They were invited to many parties now that their engagement was announced. He didn't know why but all the people he met seemed dull and stuffy. It was only when he was alone with Helena, holding her in his arms, that he felt happy and contented. But they didn't have much chance for that.

One rainy Saturday afternoon he left his office early. Unable to get a taxi, he started walking down Madison Avenue. He saw a familiar figure coming toward him, a small dark-haired vivacious girl.

"Why it's Doug Carmody, isn't it!" Lillian West said. "How are you?" Her cheeks glowed with color as she smiled warmly at him.

"Fine, thank you!" he said. Then his eyes gleamed mischievously. "Did you know that young men don't disappear with strange ladies at their engagement?"

"Do I know it!" she exclaimed with a laugh. "Bob's finally forgiven me for it."

He knew that Helena was playing bridge with some girls this afternoon, and he wouldn't see her until tonight. Impetuously, he said, "But if the young man meets the same girl in the rain don't you think they should get out of it somewhere together?"

"What else could they possibly do unless they were ducks?" she asked. "Where shall we go? The Plaza isn't too far away."

"You know what I'd like to do?" He had a sudden inspiration. "Go over to Broadway. See that 'West Is Best' sign you were telling me about."

She saw him look at her, as if afraid he were teasing her. But his eyes were serious as he went on, "I don't know anyone else who has their name in lights over New York. Not even an actress. Come on."

They had to take a crosstown bus, still unable to get a taxi. As they hung on the straps in the crowded bus, it suddenly dawned on Doug that he had never ridden in a bus with Helena, that the idea of even suggesting it would never have occurred to him.

When they reached Broadway the rain had lessened a bit. They walked through the crowds, her arm linked through his to keep them together. Then he suddenly saw the sign blazing in all its glory on top of a building. It was in three colored neon, red, blue and yellow

"That sign cost a pretty penny," Lillian commented.

"Now if your father's advertising manager were really smart he'd put your picture up on that sign too," Doug said.

She laughed. "Imagine how embarrassed Bob would be!"

"Well, I personally think it's something to be proud of!"

He saw her dark eyes lift to him. She said softly. "You know, for the first time I don't feel ashamed of it at all."

A strange glow surged through him as she said that. He liked this girl. It would be nice if Helena and he and Bob and Lillian became good friends together. "I'm

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hungry," he said. "And I've never tasted West cheese. Let's go someplace and try it."

"It's really good. I'll admit that!" she said.

They went to a little bar and grill on a side street and the waiter led them to the seclusion of a booth.

Doug watched her as she took off her hat. Her dark page-boy glistened from the rain.

"Order the cream cheese," she said. "It's Mom's original recipe and really the best."

They had two portions of the rich, creamy white cheese, served with rye bread and tall steins of foam crested beer.

They spread the cheese thickly, sipped the beer and felt warm and snug. They talked about movies and songs they liked best, about the little trivialities in life that bring people closer together.

"You know what's near here?" Doug asked later.

"No, what?" she asked eagerly.

"Gardenland. It's a dance place that I used to go to years ago. Not a fancy, place but it has wonderful music!" He leaned forward, his heart pounding with excitement, as if he could hear it already. It would be wonderful to dance with her again. "Want to go?"

There wasn't a moment's hesitation as her eyes sparkled and she answered, "I'd love it!"

Had there ever been any time but the present? Thousands of tiny lights played over the dancers, reflected from the huge mirrored chandelier that hung from the ceiling of the dance hall. The smooth gliding of feet was a muted undertone to the wild, tempestuous music.

Doug held Lillian in his arms and it was as if she had been there forever. This was no smart cafe society set dancing on the floor with them, but men and women like themselves—young, eager, getting the fullest enjoyment out of life.

He looked down at Lillian, aware of a pounding in his veins that seemed louder than the music. They danced together as though they had been born to it, he thought suddenly.

About an hour later she pulled back, as if aware of the danger of this moment. She said, "Doug, I had a date with Bob for tonight. I really forgot all about it!"

His face flushed with color, too. "I had a date with Helena. She'll be furious." He was thoughtful a second. "But it's too late now to do anything about it. They're probably doing other things now."

But it spoiled the rest of the evening for them. Guilt flooded his heart. How could he have been so careless to forget a date with Helena?

Lillian must have felt the same way because she said, "I guess I ought to be going home now. I haven't been to bed early in a long time, anyway."

He called a taxi. She lived in the East Fifties, and they were soon in the doorway of the smartly modernized old house.

SHE HELD her hand out to him. "It was fun, Doug. I think if we tell Helena and Bob exactly what happened, they'll forgive us. They might even be pleased that we're as good friends as they've always been."

"Yes, of course," he agreed. Then suddenly he pulled her close, and kissed her, and for the briefest moment he felt her response of her lips.

"We're fools," she said, pushing him away with sudden violence. Her eyes were misted with tears and her mouth trembled. "This isn't what we want in life, Doug. You know that! Life isn't just—a dance! And that's all this evening has been—the kind of madness that two people who love to work themselves up to. I want Bob, and you want Helena. Let's forget this. Goodnight." She turned, and fled into the house.

She was right, of course. He walked home, block after block in the cool night air, telling himself over and over again that she was right. He had lost his head tonight. Lillian was a nice girl but Helena was the one for him. Helena was the star to which he had hitched his wagon those many years ago. He had to forget that this night had ever happened.

When he saw Helena again he told her the truth. "I met Lillian West on Saturday. We went someplace for a drink and I just forgot about our date. I'm terribly sorry, darling. It shouldn't have happened but I guess we were anxious to be friends—for Bob's sake and yours!"

He was a bit startled by the way she retorted angrily. "Why do Bob and I have to

be friends? That was all kid stuff. And I don't like Lillian West. Don't concern yourself about my being friendly with her."

He was both relieved and annoyed by Helena's attitude. Relieved that she forgave him for forgetting their date, but annoyed that she was so vehement about Lillian and Bob.

For the next few days he worked hard. He had always enjoyed his business career. But his social life with Helena became harder than ever to take.

The dinner parties, theaters, and nightclubs they attended seemed dull and pointless. Wherever he went he found himself looking for Bob and Lillian, hoping they might run into them in spite of Helena's attitude.

He did hear from Bob Nelson one day. "I put your name up for membership to my Athletic Club as Helena suggested," Bob said over the phone. "The membership committee asked me to bring you to lunch Wednesday."

He went to lunch wih Bob and met a group of distinguished men in a luxurious paneled room hung with impressive paintings. He made no pretense about his social background, or rather lack of it, in talking to them. He found them an interesting and friendly group to his surprise, and thought he might even enjoy becoming friends with some of them.

"Our members must take a vote, Mr. Carmody. You will be notified as soon as possible."

The notification came, special delivery, to his office a few weeks later.

"My dear Mr. Carmody: We regret to inform you—" He didn't have to read much further. He crushed the letter in a tight fist, and tried to tell himself that he didn't care. But that wasn't true. It hurt, down deep, to be rejected by anybody. To be told, though not in so many words, that they didn't think he was good enough for their club!

He worried about how Helena would take it too. When he arrived at her apartment to take her out for dinner that night, he thought she must know about it already. She was pacing up and down the room, looking upset.

But it was not the matter of the club that was bothering her. "Bob called up a little while ago. He's throwing a big party at his apartment tonight and wants us to come," she said. "Lillian and he are getting married tomorrow. Without fuss, he says. They're just slipping off quietly somewhere and want to say good-by to their friends this evening."

Why did his hands tighten, as if he felt another stab at his heart at this moment? Helena went on, her voice almost hysterical, "I can't imagine why they're in such a hurry, although Bob practically admitted the rush was Lillian's idea. I suppose she's afraid of losing him. Did I tell you I met someone who went to school with her. 'Cheese-it' they used to call her." She laughed cruelly.

Anger rose within him. "I don't think that's funny. No funnier than the fact that I was rejected by Bob's club. They wrote me about it today."

He saw her face turn white. "No, Doug, it isn't true!"

He came closer to her. "It really isn't important, is it, as long as we have each other?"

"But those men—are all part of my set. And if they won't accept you—" She stopped short.

"Then how can you accept me? Is that what you mean?" he asked.

Her arms went up around his neck. "Of course not darling! What have they to do with us? As long as we have each other, that's all that counts." Her eyes shone with her love for him. "Oh darling, maybe we ought to get married quickly, like Bob and Lillian are doing. Get away from New York for a while too."

"It's something to think about," he answered seriously "Well, let's go to dinner and then to the party."

BOB'S APARTMENT was small but attractively furnished. It was thronged with people when they arrived. Doug saw Lillian, in a bright green jersey dress that set off her dark eyes and hair. He waited for the opportunity to have a moment alone with her and said, "I see you survived our escapade of the other night."

"Of course!" She was sipping a champagne cocktail and looked at him over the rim of her glass. But her eyes seemed far away, almost cold tonight.

"Congratulations are in order to you and Bob, I suppose. What's the rush?"

"Who believes in long engagements?" Was there something forced and brittle about her laughter or was he imagining it? "We might as well get it over with and settle down."

"You don't make it sound very romantic," he said. He took a step nearer, startled by the rush of his own words. "Not nearly as romantic as our night."

"That night was silly!" she retorted quickly.

"Was it? I'm beginning to wonder." He glanced to a room beyond in which there was music. "Let's dance some more. I need cheering up."

"I can help you?" she asked.

"That's right," he nodded. "I've had a blow to my pride."

She looked worried. "What happened?"

"Bob nominated me for his club, but I didn't make the grade."

There was a sudden, thoughtful look on Lillian's face. "Funny, I heard Bob talking on the phone just before the party began— He was saying that he had blackballed a prospective member. But it couldn't have been you; not if he proposed you. And yet—"

"Yet what?" His voice was quick.

She hesitated then met his eyes honestly. "He doesn't really like you. I know that from the way he carried on after we went dancing that night. But he couldn't have done this to you no matter how much he loves me!"

"Couldn't he?" he repeated. "Let's find out!"

His hand reached out and grasped her by the wrist. Pulling her along, he made his way through the crowd to where Bob and Helena were standing together.

They turned at the sight of Lillian and him. Doug said bluntly, "Bob, why did you blackball me at your club?"

The question took Bob unawares, so that he didn't have a chance to control his emotions. His eyes flooded with guilt.

"You—you don't know what you're saying—" Bob began.

"Don't I though!" Doug laughed sharply. He turned to Helena, who looked as surprised as he had been at the idea. "What do you think of your childhood pal doing a thing like that? He doesn't think I'm good enough for his club!"

"Or for Helena either!" The words came unexpectedly from Bob. His blue eyes were narrowed. "You might as well know the truth! I'm in love with Helena, and always will be! She didn't want to marry me because my father's business crashed when her Dad's did, too. Sure I blackballed you! Why should you have everything—the girl I love, the money to buy what she wants! She would have married me if things were different."

"Doug, don't listen to him!" But Doug was suddenly aware of an exultancy rising within him. Was this bit of knowledge supposed to hurt him? It didn't. It was suddenly the most wonderful news in the world!

"I'm sorry, Helena," he said. "But I'm glad we've all found out the truth about ourselves. I don't love you either. You represented something to me that I wanted in life. The unattainable, part of the success that I was reaching for."

He glanced about for Lillian and saw that she had turned and fled.

Doug said quickly to Helena and Bob, "This engagement party is yours now, if you want it. I'll even give you a gift. A job, Bob, with a good salary in my plant. I'll talk about it later."

He hurried for his hat and coat but when he reached the hall the elevator was going down already. He found the service stairway, and ran down.

Lillian was getting into a taxi. He managed to get in beside her just as the driver was about to pull away.

"Where to, miss?" the driver called.

"Where to?" Doug repeated. He reached for her hand. "Can't we leave Park Avenue? Haven't you had enough of the place? Maybe I'll never be a perfect gentleman. Maybe I'll even tease you. But I love you with all my heart and soul. Darling, don't cry about Bob!"

"I'm crying because I wasn't sure you'd come after me," she sobbed.

The driver repeated, "Where did you want to go?"

Doug laughed. "Gardenland on Broadway will do for a first stop!" He put his fingers to Lillian's chin, and tipped her head back. "A kiss, a dance, and then a wedding ring and our honeymoon as soon as possible! That's our future, honey."

"Just perfect, darling," she sighed happily as their lips met.

TO JOIN—Write me a letter telling about yourself, your school or work, your hobbies and pastimes, in fact the sort of letter which will make readers want to write to you. Sign a nickname, but also give me your real name and address plainly written. You will be given a number under which you will find your letter published in Love Short Stories.

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Notify Dora Dean at once of any change in address, giving your number, name, old and new address.

Pen Pals

DORA DEAN, Hostess

L-3444 LOVES POETRY
Here's a gal of seventeen who's hobbies are collecting love poetry, hillbilly songs, and photographs. Her hair is blonde and her eyes very blue. She is a senior in high school. She wants pals and will exchange pictures.

Lyn

L-3445 MUSICALLY INCLINED
I have been very lonely since I got out of service and would like to hear from anyone who is interested in music. I am twenty-three years old. My favorite pastime is listening to records. I have over five hundred recordings. I am six feet tall.

Slim

L-3446 HAIR STYLIST
I have been a beauty operator for ten years and like my work very much. I am thirty-two years old and a widow. I would like to write to people about that age. I love the outdoors and fish and hunt a lot. Everyone says I have a sunny disposition. I have dark brown hair and love pretty clothes.

Duchess

L-3447 LIVES IN TRAILER
I like action and thus like to participate in sports. Also, I like photography. I am thirty-six years old, six feet tall, and weigh one hundred pounds. I am rather thin. I am living in a trailer.

Chet

L-3448 SCHOOL TEACHER
I am a red-headed school teacher from a small town. I have blue eyes and am five feet, ten inches tall. I am nearing my twenty-ninth birthday. I like outdoor picnics, bowling, hiking, reading, movies, and listening to the radio. I wants lots of pen pals.

Teeny

L-3449 SONG WRITER
I am middle-aged and all alone. I would like to hear from many people and I will answer with interesting bits of news. I am a song writer by hobby I also like music, writing, dancing, reading and church.

Ami

(Please turn to page 92)

Moonlight Casanova

By MARY MARSH BROWN

Samantha thought Peter was her dream man—until she caught him kissing her sister in the moonlight.

SAMANTHA MOFFETT was a curvaceous splash of color in her yellow slack suit as she followed the walk that led around the big pond on the grounds of the Garci Crespo Hotel. The warm Mexican sunshine glittered on the green waters for which the resort was famous and the lush foliage of the gardens was alive with birds. But Sammy was too annoyed to appreciate the beauty. Over near the swimming pool that joined the pond, Gwen, her younger sister, was sunning herself on the diving board float. With her was Peter Parmelee. Gwen, whom Sammy had brought down to Mexico for the specific purpose of getting her away from Howard Farrel, was wearing her silly heart on her sleeve again!

Sammy's fingers cluched into little fists. Ever since the death of their parents, she had been mother and father to Gwen. She was determined that Gwen shouldn't be hurt by love as Sammy had been hurt. Peter was attractive and nice enough but he had that easy charm that Sammy had learned to distrust, after knowing Nils Whiting.

Nils! Unconsciously, she had allowed him to creep into her thoughts! She shook her head impatiently and her short fluff of red-gold hair seemed to flash in the sunshine. Sammy was intense, impulsive and slow to forgive. She knew she might say something rude if she joined Gwen and Peter now, so she walked into the thatched shade hut on the edge of the water and sat down on the bamboo lounge. She might have gloomed there alone but she didn't have a chance. When some of their hotel acquaintances joined the other two on the float, Peter got up and came straight into the hut. He was wearing white ducks and a bright Mexican shirt.

He grinned as he dropped down beside her. "I know you don't approve of me, beautiful. But you mustn't nurse your grudge all alone."

Sammy's blue eyes clashed with his. "Aren't you flattering yourself just a little?" she asked coolly. She could never understand the mingled sense of awareness and defiance that he aroused in her. Peter was good-looking, in a rugged way. Tall with roguish gray eyes and light sun-bleached hair. He worked at the American Consulate in Mexico and was in Garci Crespo for a vacation. That in itself spelled trouble. Gwen would probably never see him after they left. Vacation romances were always like that.

"Flattering myself?" Peter echoed. "Well, maybe I am at that." He offered her a cigarette and Sammy accepted it, conscious of his quizzical look.

"Gwen said you were peeved at me be-

"For a girl who hates men, you dance remarkably well," Peter said.

cause we were late getting back from the fiesta in town last night. Why didn't you stay with us if you're so skeptical of me?" he wanted to know.

"Next time, I'll remember to linger," she assured him.

Peter blew smoke rings. "Sammy, when are you going to stop living Gwen's life for her?"

She could feel the slow burn creep into her face. What was wrong that she could let this brash young man antagonize her so easily?

"I'm just trying to help her. Gwen's only nineteen and she's inexperienced."

Peter chuckled. "Spoken like a grandmother, angel. You're all of four years older, aren't you? Maybe being a buyer for ladies clothes does develop a sharp sense of responsibility."

She shot him a quick look. "Gwen's been talking, I see."

Peter shrugged. "Oh, just little things. Gwen did mention you decided to take your vacation in the middle of her romance with some chap named Howard Farrel, and that you insisted she come along. Do you think it's entirely fair to clip Cupid's wings that way?"

Sammy held on to her temper. His uncanny perception infuriated her but now was her chance to lay the cards on the table.

"Gwen's young and gullible and I don't think she knows her own mind yet. She's apt to mistake infatuation for something else. She's a beautiful girl who needs a secure life. Howard is the kind who would throw away a million dollar lawsuit to go on a tramp freighter. He'd make Gwen miserable."

Peter was silent a moment. "You sense those same qualities in me, don't you, and it scares you. Funny, but I have a hunch that if you didn't have Gwen to take care of, you'd be on your way to the moon yourself. You may be practical and passive but you don't look it."

Sammy smiled dryly. Hadn't she fallen in love with Nils because he was completely self possessed and lacking in restlessness? And wasn't she still in love with him even after all he'd done to her?

"If you're quite through psychoanalyzing me—" she said coldly.

Peter's blond head came very close to hers. "I haven't even started, beautiful. There's more to this than meets the eye. I think you're afraid of love for yourself. Maybe some day, I'll learn the reason why you've wrapped up your life in dry ice, why that heart of yours won't tick properly."

With that, Peter put his mouth on hers and kissed her, holding her so she couldn't break away. It was a disturbing kiss of sheer madness, irrestible and breath-taking. Even Peter looked shaken when he released her.

"Okay, I'm a heel. But, if it makes any difference, I've never wanted to kiss—"

"Don't!" Sammy was on her feet, staring down at him. "It's easy come and easy go with you, isn't it, Peter? Well, here's one girl who is going now!"

She turned and walked out of the hut. She went back along the path that led into the hotel. Went proudly with her red-gold head held high, her shoulders squared. She would never forgive Peter for his impertinence. But more than that, he had aroused emotions she'd buried so carefully. Emotions that brought back memories of her old love, Nils Whiting. Would there never be any escape from the past?

The Whiting family had a controlling interest in the department store where Sammy worked. She had met Nils, who was the publicity manager, just a year ago when he'd called in all the new buyers for a meeting. From then on, Nils had been Sammy's whole life, until that day just two months ago when she had faced Nils's mother across a tea table in the Whiting home.

"I asked you to come, my dear, because being such a good friend of Nils, I knew you'd be interested," Mrs. Whiting had told her. "Nils is going to marry Esther Linton. Her mother is one of my oldest friends and Esther and Nils grew up together. We went down to meet their train yesterday. Before Esther went east to school two years ago, it was vaguely understood. Now it's settled."

SAMMY had refused to believe it at first. Nils wouldn't let this happen to them! He'd override this silly family arrangement. But Nils didn't. Later, he tried to explain.

"I didn't know Esther thought we were still engaged. After all this time, when she

asked me if we could marry soon, I couldn't blurt out the truth. You and I have been such good friends, I knew you'd understand."

She had stayed on at the store only because her job as buyer provided good support for Gwen and herself. She avoided Nils, avoided all men. She distrusted even those Gwen knew. When young Howard Farrel, just out of law school, had persisted too much in his attentions to Gwen, Sammy had decided on a vacation to Mexico.

She unlocked the door of their hotel room now and found her sister there, changing from her bathing suit into slacks. Gwen was slighter than Sammy with light brown hair and hazel eyes. She looked up eagerly.

"I have a date to bowl with Peter in the game room. Isn't this the most heavenly place, Sammy, and Peter—well, he's just darling!"

Sammy cringed inwardly. "Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I don't know. He's exciting, and he reminds me of Howard. Peter was a fighter pilot during the war, Sammy, and before that, he travelled all over the world, writing articles. He's awfully interested in people."

"I'm sure he is," Sammy murmured and walked over to the bureau where she stared at her reflection without really seeing herself. Go on! she thought fiercely. Tell Gwen that her darling Peter kissed you a while ago. Disillusion her now before it's too late. But, somehow, she couldn't. "You know, I think I'd like to bowl too," she announced aloud. "I haven't done it in ages."

Gwen paused in her dressing to smile at her. "I'm glad you're taking an interest in things, Sammy. I was afraid you never would—after Nils."

Sammy lowered her eyes to hide a sudden spasm of pain. "Nils was a good lesson for both of us, Gwen baby. Men aren't very reliable and so far, I haven't seen one worthy of you. Just the way it should be. I want everything for you. I want you to know real happiness."

Gwen smiled. "You mean you want things too easy for me, Sammy. You don't want life to even touch me. Don't you

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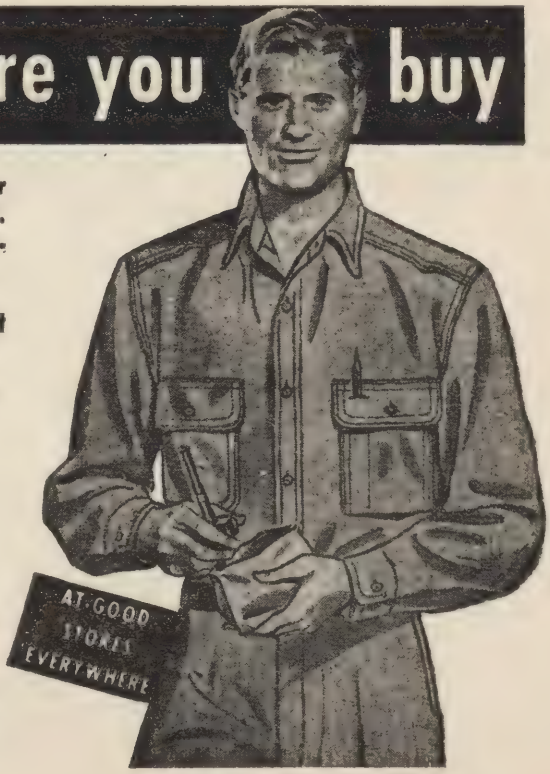

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think I can take excellent care of myself?"

Sammy frowned at her. "That doesn't sound like you, Gwen. Someone's been giving you ideas. Silly ideas!" She had a definite suspicion who that someone might be.

Peter was waiting in the game room and Sammy was sure one corner of his mouth curled in secret amusement when he saw her with Gwen.

"Both my little Miss Muffets!" he exclaimed. "And, I hope, not easily frightened away by a spider?"

Sammy tossed back her red-gold head and smiled pleasantly. There was just a hint of scorn in her answer.

"Only big wolves scare us, Peter. That's why we hunt in pairs."

Peter matched that smile but there was challenge in his eyes. "It's what you're hunting for that makes the game worthwhile or not."

"What kind of double talk it this?" Gwen asked, looking from one to the other.

Peter shook his head. "I don't really know, Gwen. Your sister, Samantha, is a devilishly unpredictable female. We always seem to be questioning each other's motives."

"Well, I trust you anyway, Peter" Gwen told him gayly but she gave him a meaning smile that made Sammy wince. Gwen didn't just like Peter. She was probably falling in love with him! Offering her big, gullible heart to be broken, just as Sammy had once offered hers!

Sammy turned away and walked over to one of the alleys. Picking up a ball, she flung it down on the smooth floor, knocking over all but two pins. She wished fiercely she could roll Peter's blond head the same way. Roll him right out of their lives.

They bowled until five o'clock that evening and then Peter invited them into the lounge for cocktails.

"To lovely ladies and romance!" he said cheerfully, raising his glass. "And to love!"

Sammy glared at him warningly, but his gray eyes only laughed back at her. Gwen didn't notice. She was staring dreamily into space.

"I wonder how a girl knows when she's in love?" she murmured.

"That's easy, Gwen," Peter said in a low voice. "You're in love when you can think of nothing but that person. When you want to be with him all the time."

"Really?" Gwen said softly. Sammy caught her breath. Her sister and Peter were looking deep into each other's eyes.

"Gwen, I think we'd better get ready for dinner." she suggested quickly.

Gwen nodded. "All right, but I want to get some postcards first. I'll meet you in the room, Sammy. See you later, Peter." And with a warm smile for them both, she was gone.

"Your sister's growing up, Sammy," Peter murmured. "What are you going to do about it?"

"We'll be leaving here next week." It was all the answer he deserved.

"So Miss Muffet is letting the spider frighten her away after all." Peter observed dryly. "I'm disappointed."

Sammy smiled but her blue eyes sparked anger. "Maybe I'm just thinking of another nursery rhyme that goes, 'Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater! Stole a wife and couldn't keep her!'" She left before he had a chance to reply.

A TROUPE of *mariachis* or wandering minstrels played during that evening. Sammy wore a blue crepe and Gwen a pink one and they sat at a long table with some of the other guests. Peter was there too.

Sammy danced first with one of the older men while Peter led Gwen out onto the floor. She couldn't keep her eyes off them and, when Peter and her sister disappeared into the gardens, she felt her heart lurch queerly.

The music stopped and Sammy excused herself and wandered over to the big door that led outside. There was a bright, low hung moon and silhouetted against it stood Gwen and Peter! They were in each other's arms with Gwen's head against his shoulder!

Somehow, Sammy managed to get back into the hotel without making an outcry. She chatted and laughed with the other guests withont knowing what she did. She wasn't even aware that Gwen and Peter had come back to the table until she heard a voice in her ear.

"Shall we dance now, Sammy?"

Peter was in back of her chair and the

same challenging grin was on his face. She ached to slap him right there in front of everyone, but, of course, she couldn't. She could only nod and get up and dance with him.

Peter was easy to follow and they danced in perfect unison. Surprisingly so.

"For anyone who hates men, Sammy, you dance remarkably well," Peter observed.

"Oh, I used to get around," she said airily.

"You should do it again." Then, when the music ended, he took her arm and deliberately walked her out into the gardens.

"Will you go over to the rock island with me, Sammy? I'd like to talk to you without being interrupted."

She couldn't refuse. He'd make something of it if she did. Besides, there had to be a showdown about Gwen sometime.

The island was a tiny green haven in the pond, studded with cacti and boasting a single palm tree in the center. They crossed the moon bathed water by a narrow bridge.

"I'm surprised you'd come out here with me, Sammy," he murmured. "You knew I'd try to make love to you, didn't you?"

She was startled. So that was how this moonlight Casanova wanted to play it! But she could go him one better. To keep him away from Gwen, she could use her wiles on him herself.

"Of course, I knew, Peter. Wasn't this night, this island just made for romance?"

Peter looked at her oddly. "Gwen told me about Nils Whiting tonight so I'm beginning to understand you a little better. I think it's time you defrost that hangover heart of yours, angel. But when you do, I hope you really mean it."

Sammy stiffened. Somehow, it was humiliating that Peter should have found out about Nils. But she'd defeat her purpose by quarreling with him.

"Peter, when you meet someone new, the past just doesn't matter any more," she said softly. "Someone nice like yourself."

"Sammy, you're wonderful!" Peter breathed. "I liked you from the beginning because you were willing to fight for what you believed in, even if it were wrong. Gwen should have what she wants—"

"Peter!" Sammy leaned toward him. "Can't we forget Gwen?" He infuriated her and yet every pulse in her body was hammering with a curious anticipation.

Peter was a man of action. He took her in his arms and kissed her. He kissed her as if this heartbeat of rapture meant life itself. He kissed her as if he hadn't just a while ago been making love to her own sister!

That last thought cut through the mist of emotion that had settled around her. Resentful, frightened by the unexpected response of her heart, she jerked away from him.

"You see, I can play games too. Something to match that terrific technique of yours, Peter! No wonder my little sister found you and the moonlight irresistible!"

"Then maybe Gwen's the girl for me after all!" Peter said stubbornly, his face set.

Sammy didn't answer him. She jumped up and hurried across the bridge and she didn't stop until she was safely in her own room. Leaning helplessly against the closed door, she realized that this was the second time she had run from Peter and his kisses. Nothing made sense—and she had tried so hard to be sensible. She must talk to Gwen tonight, plan to leave there as soon as possible. Peter was dangerous!

But Sammy didn't have a chance to speak to her sister. She drifted off to sleep before Gwen came to bed. A restless, disturbed sleep, full of strange dreams. Nils seemed to be in all of them, but he'd changed. Instead of dark hair, his hair was light and he had gray eyes.

Gwen was gone when Sammy awoke the next morning. She wondered if her sister were trying to avoid her. If she were, Peter was undoubtedly responsible!

Deciding to have one last swim, Sammy pulled on her white bathing suit and slipped into a pale green jacket that reached her knees. After breakfast in the grill, she wandered into the gardens, looking for Gwen. She was walking around to the diving float when someone called her name.

"Sammy!"

That voice! She couldn't turn. She couldn't even move. She stood there, transfixed, waiting.

He was there! She didn't know how or why. But Nils Whiting, the one man she'd never wanted to see again, was standing beside her!

"Sammy darling!" He caught both her hands and she stared at him, stricken. He

was the Nils she'd once loved all right. Tall with dark hair and deep set brown eyes. Handsome and distinguished looking.

"Hello, Nils," she said, surprisingly controlled.

"Sammy, you would come to some distant spot like this for your vacation," he chided. "But it doesn't matter now that I've found you."

Nils hated to travel, she remembered irrelevantly. He'd never understood why she enjoyed her buying trips East.

"You've been looking for me?" she echoed dully. "Why?"

"Because I wanted to tell you myself how things worked out with Esther. I tried, Sammy. I tried to be nice to her and pretend I was happy over the engagement. But she finally guessed the truth and released me, darling."

She couldn't say anything. She could only stand there and listen to the sound of his voice. Only this time it didn't do the usual wild things to her heart.

"Sammy, I came as soon as I could," Nils said eagerly. "We can be married right away, if you like. There's nothing to stop us now."

NOTHING? She looked at him. She should be elated, shouldn't she? Nils had come down there to make things right between them. But something was wrong. Did she love him as much as she once had? She had never thought of herself as fickle, yet there was no denying that the old wonder and happiness was gone.

"Nils, it's going to take more than words to make up for what's happened."

"Honey, I know that. But if you'll just give me a chance. I'll make it up to you."

"Nils, you mean—" But her voice trailed away. Peter was coming toward them. He had on swimming trunks and a robe across his shoulders. To get to the diving float, he would have to pass them.

Peter drew near. "Good morning, Sammy," he said politely but his eyes were cold. They told her he hadn't forgotten last night.

Nor had she! Sammy's chin lifted. "Hello Peter!" she said breezily and then some devilish impulse prompted her to add, "I want you to meet an old friend of mine, Nils Whiting!"

Peter's face was expressionless. He shook hands with Nils, murmured something about a swim and was gone before Sammy could enjoy any triumph. Instead, she felt curiously flat.

Nils went on calmly as if they hadn't been interrupted. He was always like that. Serene, calm and patrician. It was odd that those very things that had drawn her to him seemed now to lack life and vitality.

"I have everything planned for us, Sammy. Mother wants us to live with her and, of course, you'll give up your position in the store."

Sammy tried to arouse herself. "But I want my own home, Nils, and I'd like to help you in the store too."

Peter, she saw, was sitting alone on the edge of the pool now, dangling his feet in the water. The sun glistened on the muscles of his tanned back, made his light hair shine. She looked away quickly.

"But, Sammy, you know mother holds the purse strings so it may be a while before we can talk her into the idea of our home," Nils protested. "As for working, that's just out, darling. You'll have to arrange your whole life from now on and associate with those who count. You'll be Mrs. Nils Whiting, darling."

She shrank from him. Every fiber of her being rebelled against what he proposed. She was to be and to do what he wanted!

There was a familiar ring to all this, she realized with a start. She too had wanted to domineer. Hadn't she tried to make Gwen conform to a pattern of her own? Hadn't she been unwilling to let her sister lead her own life? Just because her own courage had been shaken, she'd tried to make a coward of Gwen!

Suddenly, unconsciously, Sammy started walking toward the pool, toward Peter. Nils, mistaking her preoccupied silence, fell into step beside her. He was talking about the future but she didn't hear him.

Peter was poised on the diving board now. His body made a beautiful arc in the air, cut the water like a knife. Sammy stood there on the edge, watching, waiting for him to reappear.

She wanted to tell him now that she wouldn't interfere any more where Gwen and he were concerned. From now on, her sister was on her own. She would have to face whatever came, even heartbreak if that had to be.

But Peter didn't come up! Sammy bent

over the water and then, suddenly panic stricken, she tore off her jacket, flung it at Nils. The water closed over her head before he could protest.

Sammy was a good swimmer and it was easy for her to force her way to the bottom of the pool. She groped around, straining to see through the green water. Inside her something terrified and desperate kept screaming Peter's name.

Her lungs were almost bursting when abruptly she collided with someone under water! It was Peter! Sammy reached out, wrapped one arm around his neck in life saving manner. It was surprising that Peter was the one who somehow boosted them both to the surface.

He seemed all right but Sammy didn't let go until they could stand upright in shallower water. Then she stared at him wildly, frantically.

"You're okay?" she whispered. "I saw you dive in and then when you didn't come up, I was scared, Peter."

His eyes widened incredulously. "My gosh, who was saving who! I was only practicing underwater swimming. I came up for air just as you hit the water. When you didn't come up, I went down after you right away."

"Oh Peter! Me and my wise ideas!" Sammy pushed her wet hair back from her face. She was probably a sight but it didn't matter. Peter was safe! "I was waiting to tell you something. I wanted you to know that I'm not standing in Gwen's way any more. I'm not ever going to boss her life. So if you and she—"

"But Gwen's gone back to the States. She packed while you were at breakfast and left just a few moments ago. She wanted me to say good-by to you, and to ask that she be forgiven."

"But why would she leave?" Sammy gasped. "I saw you together last night—" Her voice trailed away uncertainly. Remembrance of Gwen in Peter's arms was painful, doubly so now. She may have got over Nils—but that was no guarantee that she could trust Peter. If Gwen had gone, he must have been responsible. She asked again, "Why did she leave, Peter?"

"Gwen only thought she cared for me because I reminded her of her Howard Farrel. She's really in love with that boy, Sammy. I was only trying to comfort her, get her straightened out in her mind and her heart."

Sammy stared at him. "Wasn't that awfully noble? You said yourself you wanted Gwen."

"Only because you made me angry," Peter said in a low voice. "Deep down, I've been afraid of you, afraid of falling in love and getting turned down. So, of course, I had to go right ahead and do just that." He looked away. "But you should worry about me, Sammy. You have your Nils back now."

"But I don't want Nils!" Sammy protested. "Oh Peter darling, don't you see? I've been terribly in love and didn't know it. I've been fighting myself when I really wanted you. Oh Peter, would it be too shocking and daring if I asked you to marry me?"

Peter looked dazed but only for a moment. He caught her to him and laughed softly. "You'd shock me right into accepting, angel! Just try me!" And his kiss told more than words could, how very much he wanted to marry her.

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By
KATHLEEN GODWIN

"You'd better learn the difference between acting a love scene, and living one," was Riff's advice to Trina.

Understudy For Love

THE HOUSE looked aloof, yet at the same time lonely, as though the lights had been turned off inside its lovely ancient shell. Trina Thorne parked the low gray convertible in front of the wide steps and looked at the white columned splendor of the house. It was like pictures she had seen of old southern mansions with its tall columns and exquisite grill work. The wisteria hung over the terrace and blooming lilac bushes grew by the walk, looking as though they were waiting too.

Trina wondered why Laurel had not wanted to come back here and claim what was rightfully hers. But Laurel had never lived in this old home of her husband, Nick Randolph. Nick had been dead almost a year now and Laurel must claim the house if his estate was to be hers. Nick's grandmother, old Mrs. Randolph, must be a strange person to make the demands her lawyers had forwarded to Laurel. She must have been psychic or a good detective, to know that Laurel could not possibly leave New York at this time.

She opened the car door and stepped to the ground, a slender girl wearing a yellow suit that almost matched her pale gold hair. Her wide brown eyes touched the lilac bush lovingly. It had been years since she had seen lilac bushes or had smelled their gay elusive fragrance. Impulsively she hurried to the lilac bush and broke off a heavy cluster, burying her face in it.

"Very touching, but I happen to be the only audience on hand," a cold mocking masculine voice said from just above her head.

Trina looked up, her eyes tangling with scornful gray eyes in a lean tanned face. No man, certainly not such a handsome man, had ever looked at her in that way. He was tall, broad-shouldered, wearing a faded khaki shirt and darker riding pants. His boots were old and polished to a rich glossy brown almost the color of his crisp, short-cut hair.

"And I'm not easily impressed," he added, vaulting the grilled railing of the terrace and landing in front of her.

She twisted the lilac spray in her slender, ringless hand, feeling absurdly ashamed of what must have appeared a theatrical gesture. Why shouldn't she make theatrical gestures, when for the past two years her every thought and effort had been spent on trying to get a major role in a stage production? When she had been working, living, breathing the theater? Then Laurel had won a coveted part and agreed to help Trina get her start.

She lifted her chin stubbornly and appraised the man standing before her. He wasn't handsome in the smooth calculating way of the men she was accustomed to meeting. There was a strength and virility about him that was almost frightening. The way he looked at her made quick anger whip

"Why do you dislike me, when you don't even know me?" Trina asked in her forthright way.

through her. He had no right to judge a person he had never seen before.

"Who are you, anyway?" she asked, betraying her surprise at finding a man there. Laurel had said only Mrs. Randolph and her servants lived in the house. She had mentioned no men in the family.

"My name is Riff Ashley, but that means nothing to you. Or did Nick ever mention me?" he replied evenly.

The name rang a bell of memory somewhere within her mind, but, at the moment, she couldn't recall where she had heard it before. "How do you do, Mr. Ashley," she said formally. "So nice of you to be my welcoming committee."

"Welcome to Fairacres," he said mockingly. "You don't expect a sincere welcome, do you?"

"I see no reason why not," Trina answered truthfully. Perhaps there were things Laurel had not told her. Laurel had been so busy with the lead in the new play and with her new romance with Barry Trent, the author, that she had been too busy for details.

"Just go down to South Carolina to Nick's home and be me for a few days. Don't let that old dragon, Mrs. Randolph, keep me from having what belongs to me," Laurel had said in her warm husky voice. And Trina had agreed without considering just what the assignment might mean.

"You're not as perspicuous as I thought, if you really believe that," Riff Ashley said. His gray eyes measured her thoughtfully. "In fact, you're not at all as I pictured you," he added as though he were making a grand concession.

Surely it wasn't in the way she looked, Trina thought. She and Laurel had both understudied the actress, Lisa Martell, because both of them had pale gold hair and wide brown eyes like hers. But there the resemblance ended. Laurel was taller, almost regal, with a lazy litheness about her movements, reminiscent of a tawny cat. Trina was smaller, piquantly lovely, with warm eagerness in her oval face.

"Why do you dislike me so, when you don't even know me?" Trina asked in her forthright way. That was part of the impulsiveness about her, she knew, never going round a problem but meeting it head on.

He did not speak for a moment. She saw a shadow flit across his face and his eyes grow hard. The corners of his mouth tightened ominously.

"But I do know you, Laurel Randolph. I know you better than you know yourself, perhaps," he said quietly.

She bit back words of denial, remembering that she was here as a stand-in for Laurel. Already she wished she had not come here. It had sounded so easy when Laurel asked her. And she would do anything for Laurel to repay her for her kindness.

"How interesting," she said, attempting to bluff a coolness she did not feel. "Shall we go in to meet Mrs. Randolph now," he asked formally.

Trina felt panic inside her. "Couldn't I—I mean, if I had a few minutes to freshen up. It was a long trip you know. And I do want to look well when I meet her."

"How thoughtless of me. Of course," he agreed.

As if by magic, two servants appeared and took her bags out of the car into the house.

"Martha will show you to your room and help you," Riff said.

A young girl turned and grinned, showing even white teeth. "Yes ma'm. I will."

Trina felt an odd reluctance to leave Riff Ashley and go into the strange house alone. Even if he did not like her, he was no longer a complete stranger.

"Just where do you fit in here?" she asked curiously. "Are you a relative or neighbor?"

"A neighbor right now. I'm staying in Wisteria Cottage."

He turned and crossed the lawn. She wanted to cry after him, beg him to stay. Instead, she turned and climbed the steps to the house, feeling completely alone.

"This was Mister Nick's room," Martha confided as she showed Trina into an enormous old-fashioned room with a canopied four poster bed, heavy mahogany furniture, and wide bay windows curtained in crisp chintz.

Trina had met Nick Randolph only once. It was right after his return from the war when they had all spent the week-end at Barry Trent's country place, just a month before the accident which had taken Nick's life. Laurel was too ill from the shock to go to South Carolina to the funeral and Mrs.

Randolph had not forgiven her for her absence. Poor Laurel. How she must have regretted not going home with Nick. Perhaps if she had gone with him nothing would have happened, she might have kept him from riding the spirited horse that had thrown him. That must be why Mrs. Randolph and Riff Ashley felt as they did.

She had a warm scented bath in the surprisingly modern bathroom next to her room. She changed into a lilac-colored linen dress, absently tucking a spray of lilac into her shining hair. Martha returned.

"Mrs. Randolph will see you now. She's in her room," the girl said.

"Is she ill?" Trina asked, a sudden fear clutching her throat. She couldn't bear to deceive an old lady who was ill. Yet she had promised Laurel and must keep that promise, no matter what.

"Yes ma'am." Martha shook her head sadly. "That's why she wanted you to come."

AT THE end of the hall, Martha opened the door into a large room where spring sunlight filtered through crisply ruffled white organdy curtains and picked out the small frail figure in the enormous old bed. Bright blue eyes peered at Trina from a tired old face under a smooth snowy pompador. Mrs. Randolph was propped up against ruffled pillows, her small hands folded on the covers. The lavender knitted bed jacket she wore added a touch of color. Trina's heart went out to the old lady.

"Sit down, Laurel." There was nothing gentle about the voice. It held austere command, and the assurance of having every order obeyed.

She lowered herself into a straight chair, sitting stiffly erect on the edge. Laurel would have picked that wing chair and lolled in it lazily, gracefully.

"So you did come. I had an idea you wouldn't."

"I'm sorry," Trina said sincerely. "I mean, about last year." She wished that Laurel had come here then.

"What about your career, Laurel?" the old lady asked, dismissing her implied apology.

Laurel's career was quite safe, even to her brand new stage name which fitted her new life. Laurel was not the type to let even the death of her husband interfere with her life. Life for the living was surely her credo.

"You aren't really interested in my career. Why did you send for me?" Trina asked, the gentleness in her voice taking the sting out of the words.

"Let's not say everything we have to say the first time we meet. That will leave nothing for the rest of the time," Mrs. Randolph replied, quiet firmly.

"So I'm going to stay a while?" Trina said.

"Naturally." For the first time, the ghost of a smile haunted the lips of the old lady.

"Doing penance?" Trina asked with a touch of spirit.

"Won't it be worth it?" Mrs. Randolph asked.

"I don't understand. I don't understand at all," Trina said slowly.

"I think you do. My letters were quite explicit."

Trina wished she had read the letters more closely. She wished she were back in New York, even in a bit part in a play, anywhere but here. Yet she knew that, under other circumstances, this could have been quite different.

"What do you want me to do?" Trina asked.

"Easy my child. There's no hurry at all." The old lady nodded toward a snapshot in a leather frame on the night table. It was a picture of Nick and Laurel, but mercifully indistinct. Laurel's head was half turned and her pale hair cascaded to her shoulders. She was sitting beside Nick. Yet it might have been Trina in the picture, it was so vague. "You're different from the way I imagined you. Or from Nick's letters. But Men never see distinctly when they're in love."

"You don't like me," Trina said, a note of disappointment in her voice.

"Quite the contrary." Mrs. Randolph told her, "In fact, I think we'll get along. In spite of all Riff predicted."

"Riff?" Trina's voice held a question.

"He was Nick's best friend. His family used to live near here, then moved away. He's writing a book and he came back for peace and quiet. He's staying in Wisteria Cottage on the estate." She explained. "You won't like him."

"He hates me," Trina answered.

"Then you two have met." The old lady leaned back against the pillows looking paler and tired. "Riff was with Nick last spring just before—" she could not go on. She swallowed hard. "I don't know why he should hate you."

"You're tired," Trina said gently. "Perhaps I shouldn't stay so long."

"I hope you won't be too lonely," Mrs. Randolph said softly. "Come in to see me tomorrow and we'll talk longer. Make yourself at home," she added.

Trina walked around the great empty house feeling oddly at home. She loved it already. Then various facets of her present problem confronted her. She must go into town after dinner and telephone Laurel. It was necessary to have more information about the situation. And she would ask about Riff Ashley.

After a solitary dinner in the large dining room with its gleaming mahogany and old silver lovely in the flickering candlelight, she strolled out to her car. As she approached the gate toward the road she noticed back in the trees, a small cottage with one side completely draped in wisteria. That must be where Riff was staying. As she turned into the main road she saw a tall figure ahead, walking in the same direction in which she was going. She recognized Riff at once though he looked different in tweeds, with a pipe in his mouth, his eyes gazing steadily in front of him.

On an impulse, she stopped the car when she was beside him.

"Going to the village, Mr. Ashley?" she asked in a cool mocking voice. She would show she didn't care how he felt about her.

"Thank you, Mrs. Randolph," he answered as coolly.

She felt a surge of unreasoning excitement as he slid into the car beside her. Had she met this man under different circumstances how different everything might have been. But she would not think of that now.

"I know all about you, Mr. Ashley." She smiled slowly, knowingly.

"Not everything," he protested in mock horror. Then his voice became serious and almost threatening. "You don't know how much Nick told me."

"Does it matter?" she replied lightly. A cold hand clutched her heart as she read the look on Riff's face. It did matter a great deal. Only she did not even know what Laurel had written her husband last spring.

"You really are an excellent actress, you know," he said, but there was neither admiration nor approval in his voice, only a cool distaste.

"I gather that you don't like actresses," she replied, trying to hide the fact that it mattered.

"I've never known any."

There was no answer to that. And it did not seem worthwhile to pursue the subject further. He had spoken with a note of finality.

"Lovely country around here," she said, glancing out at the low rolling countryside and back to the road that unwound like pale ribbon in the twilight.

"Peaceful," he agreed. He gave her a long appraising look. "At least, it was peaceful."

She took her glance from the road ahead long enough to look into his eyes for a brief moment. Something in the impact of their two personalities clashing left her oddly shaken. She clenched her hands on the steering wheel and looked straight ahead. She wished she had passed by this impossible young man who hated her. Why had she stopped and asked him to ride to the village?

He made a few passing remarks about the scenery and landmarks in the small lovely old town that was built around a square. But they said nothing personal. They went into the drug store and she found a telephone booth in the back. She put in her long distance call and after a few minutes, found it impossible to reach Laurel. "I'll try again," she told the operator. She was dissappointed because she must go another day without knowing as much as she should about the part she was playing.

RIFF WAS standing in the front of the drug store buying pipe tobacco and cigarettes. He seemed in a better humor somehow.

"How about a soda?" he suggested.

"I'd love it," she agreed without thinking.

They sat on the high stools before the marble counter, facing their images in a wide mirror on which were painted various delicious soda concoctions. She felt ab-

surdly young and happy as she sipped the sharp sweetness of the chocolate soda. She was reminded of other days when she had stopped at the drug store on the way home from school in the small town where she lived. She told Riff. He grinned happily; then his face sobered.

"I would never thought of you as being a small-town girl. In fact, I thought Nick said—" he broke off abruptly.

"Nick said what?" she asked with a catch in her voice.

"I don't remember now," he replied.

As they started back to the car she noticed the bright lights of a small theater across the street, and remarked on her surprise that such a new film would be showing.

"Want to see it?" he asked.

She nodded. "Very much," she agreed, thinking of the lonely old house and knowing she could not possibly go to sleep for hours.

"Come on, then." They crossed the street and she glanced at the movie stars' photographs framed one under the other outside the theater.

She looked at him unbelievingly, wondering at his change of heart. He was actually being kind to her.

They found seats in the small darkened theater that smelled of peanuts and chewing gum and cheap perfumes, and watched the flickering figures on the screen. At an exciting place in the film, Trina gripped the arm of her seat and then found her hand enclosed by warm firm fingers. Riff was smiling gently.

"You aren't acting this you know; you're just a spectator," he whispered.

"I always forget that." She smiled softly. But she did not withdraw her hand from his firm clasp. Nor did he move his hand away from hers.

Under the spell of the film and a sweet nostalgia for the times when she had been just a small-town girl enjoying such simple pleasures, Trina forgot she was going to try to telephone Laurel again.

"You drive," she suggested as they got in her car. "I don't know the road too well after dark."

"There's something I want to show you," Riff told her as they drove toward Fairacres. "It will be especially lovely tonight, with the moonlight."

They drove up a small hill and stopped before a grilled gate that opened into a small park. Just below a perfect little lake gleamed silver bright in the moonlight. Black swans floated on its mirror smooth surface like graceful ebony shadows. The scent of magnolia and honeysuckle lent a heady fragrance to the air.

"It's beautiful," she said quietly.

"It's a memorial to a man who lost his life in the first World War. To Nick's father," he said evenly. "His son was lucky. He came back home only to die here. Because his wife didn't love him any longer."

"What are you trying to say?"

"The letter you wrote Nick. Remember?"

"You keep talking about that letter. How should you know what was in a letter not addressed to you?" she asked.

"Poor Nick. Did you treat your Barry the same way?"

"What do you know about Barry?" she flared.

"Are you in love with him?"

"Certainly not," she replied before she thought. It was wrong, . . . Laurel was in love with Barry, she knew.

"Then who's the current leading man? Or are you just shopping around?"

"How dare you!" she said as fury flamed through her. She drew her hand back and slapped him hard across the cheek. Her fingers were stinging with the impact as she withdrew her hand and looked at his face. Even in the moonlight she could see the pale red imprint of her hand on his bronzed cheeks.

She would have said she was sorry but she didn't have a chance. She had never struck a man before. His arms were around her like a steel vise, pulling her close to him.

"Don't you know what happens to little girl who slap men? It always goes this way in plays," he said through clenched teeth. Then he was kissing her fiercely, bruisingly. It was more of an insult than a caress, yet she found herself responding, her lips coming alive under his, like a flower bursting into bloom.

He released her abruptly. She was overcome with shame that she actually clung to him. What was the matter with her anyway? She acted as if she were in love with this man who hated her. But he didn't hate

her at all. He hated Laurel. And he thought she was Laurel.

He kicked the starter and meshed the gears with a grating sound. He wasn't left completely unmoved by that kiss, she thought.

"Riff, I've got to tell you something," she said slowly.

"Nothing you can say will make any difference at all to me." The cold finality in his voice was frightening.

"I think what I have to say might." Her voice was taut with emotion. Then the words spilled out over each other. They were not the words she meant to say at all, the cool truthful words that would tell him about Laurel. Instead her impulsiveness ran away with her. The things she felt were too strong to hold back. "I'm in love with you, Riff. That's why you must hear what I have to say."

As she looked at his face, she knew she had said the wrong thing. Nothing could have been worse. He would think she was the kind of person he believed her to be.

He was not listening. His whole mind was concentrated on driving the car, speeding through the moonlit night. But she would speak anyway.

"You see, I'm not Laurel Randolph at all. I came here because—" she broke off. How could she explain to him that she felt such admiration and gratitude to Laurel, she had been willing to do anything for her. She had been so glad Laurel stepped into the part Lisa Martell had given up that she had been willing to do what her friend asked. But how could she explain that to someone outside the theater, someone who wouldn't understand the extravagant loyalties of show people.

"Yes? Why did you come here?" he asked.

"You don't act surprised. When did you find out?"

"The more I talked to you, the more certain I was that you could not possibly have been the girl Nick married. But I couldn't figure out your angle. I still can't."

She looked at him unbelievingly. Her confession should have made a difference. Instead he was more completely alienated than ever. And it mattered terribly.

"If I could make you see—"

"You can't." His voice was harsh. "Nothing is real to you. It's all part of a play. When do you stop your acting?"

"It was real when you kissed me, Riff," she told him softly.

"For the moment, yes. You really put your whole heart into any scene you play. That's why there's nothing left over for the real things, the important things in life." She knew he was wrong but he left nothing for her to say.

He drove up before the big house, telling her he would put the car in the garage and walk back to the cottage.

"Thank you, Riff," she said quietly.

Trina walked up the graceful old staircase, trailing her hand along the banister which had been polished for generations into satiny smoothness. As she started toward her room she passed the open door to Mrs. Randolph's room.

"Laurel," the old lady's voice called softly.

Trina turned and looked in at the door. The old lady was propped against her pillows, a fragile figure in the light of a lamp on the night table.

She looked at Trina with approval and a soft smile curved her lips.

"I'm not like some men's families would be, Laurel. Life is for the living. Nick would be happy if he knew you were able to like someone else. He would want nothing better for you than someone like Riff Ashley."

"But I just met him today," Trina protested. "It's ridiculous."

"He who loves not at first sight never loves at all!" the old lady said softly. "Some poet I used to admire a great deal said that." She motioned toward the chair beside her bed. "Sit down, Laurel. Lovely name, Laurel—like springtime. It is spring again, Laurel. It's time for you to forget you're an actress and be a woman."

"You mustn't be so kind. I don't deserve it," Trina said miserably. If only Laurel had come on here and met this kind but firm old lady she had called a dragon.

"You're our kind, Laurel. You know, until I met you, I was afraid you were one of those cold calculating career women. I'm glad you're as you are."

"Thank you." Trina could not say more. Sobs chocked her throat.

"Good night, now. We'll talk again in the morning." Mrs. Randolph said reaching out a slender, blue-veined hand to pat Trina.

Trina cried herself to sleep in the huge four poster bed that night. Too much had happened that day. She was confused and miserable, and completely, irrevocably in love.

BLYTHE BIRD songs and the fragrance of coffee mingled with the scent of the honeysuckle coming through the window awoke her next morning. For a moment she felt happy and at home, until she remembered.

Martha came in laden with a tray that held tiny hot biscuits and ham, fruit juice and coffee and fluffy yellow eggs.

"Miss Randolph suggested that you go riding this morning. The horses in the stables could use the exercise."

"Thank you, Martha," Trina said, taking the tray on her knees in bed. The girl adjusted the windows and then withdrew.

When Trina passed Mrs. Randolph's door a short while later, the old lady called to her. "Aren't you going riding?"

"I couldn't." Trina said quickly.

"None of that now. Nick told me you loved to ride." She paused and looked into Trina's face. "You won't let what happened to Nick spoil it for you. He wouldn't want that."

The morning stretched ahead in dull monotony. It would give her something to do and, if it pleased Mrs. Randolph, why not? Luckily, she had brought her riding clothes.

As she reached the front hall Martha was coming from the door with a yellow envelope in her hand. "It says 'Miss Thorne' but we don't have a Miss Thorne here."

"Let me see that, Martha," Trina almost snatched the envelope from the girl's hand. What in the world had got into Laurel, addressing a telegram that way.

She opened it with trembling fingers.

You can come home now stop Am marrying Barry and with the part too I care nothing about the old house stop thanks anyway and I'll see you soon stop. Gratefully.

Laurel

She was expected just to walk out and say, "Thank you, I had a nice time." Then forget all about her trip to South Carolina. But Trina knew she could not do that. She crumpled the telegram into her pocket and made her way out the back of the house toward the stables. Staying a little while longer wouldn't hurt anything. And she would have to think of something to tell Mrs. Randolph.

An eager stable boy showed her around, pointing out the horses and telling her the name of each one. She picked a fiery-looking black stallion.

"Saddle that one," she said. The boy hesitated. "Don't be alarmed. I can ride."

"But that's Othello. Mr. Ashley always rides him," the boy said dubiously.

"Is it his horse?" she asked.

"Well, no. But he not going to like that."

"Saddle him, anyway. If Mr. Ashley says anything, just refer him to me," she told the boy with a hint of defiance.

The boy was staring over her shoulder, his dark eyes wide, his mouth parting in a white-toothed smile. She turned and met Riff's eyes.

"Mr. Ashley does object. You couldn't control a horse like Othello." Riff said pleasantly. But there was a coldness in his eyes that she did not like.

The boy looked uncertainly from one to the other.

"Saddle him anyway, Bo, we can fight it out afterward. It isn't as though Miss—Mrs. Randolph—rode side saddle," Riff said smoothly, hesitating only over her name.

"You're insufferable," she said, low.

"You're talking about the man you love, remember," he whispered tauntingly.

"I hate you," she replied, but without much sincerity.

"I figured out why you came. Laurel had other fish to fry but she wanted Fairacres too. So she sent you in her place, to take advantage of an innocent old lady." His voice held complete disdain.

"She doesn't want it now," Trina said.

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"I'm going to tell Mrs. Randolph and then I'm going to leave," she said defiantly.

Then she turned and jumped on the horse Bo had led out and rode away. She heard Riff call after her but she was to angry to answer.

Off the grounds she gave the horse his head and he fairly skimmed over the rolling countryside. It was exhilarating at first, but after a few minutes she felt uneasy. Ac-

customed to a quiet canter in Central park, she was unused to riding a horse used for cross country hunts. She wished she had not been so impetuous again. Jerking on the reins, she tried to slow the horse but he tossed his head impatiently and galloped on. She was becoming dizzy from her swift flight across the uneven land.

Trina saw the fence and managed to hang on to the horse, but as he went straight toward a higher stone wall, she lost her nerve and her grip. She felt dizzy and then succumbed into blessed nothingness.

Time was a mottled thing of darkness and light. Once she was sure she was looking into Riff's face. It was no longer remote and scornful, but anxious. Then she opened her eyes to the already familiar chintz hangings.

"No bones broken. She'll be all right in a little while," a kindly unfamiliar voice said, close by. It must be a doctor, she decided, opening her eyelids slightly.

"The little idiot. I shouldn't have let her ride Othello. It's my fault." It was Riff's voice holding the same anxiety she had imagined she had seen.

"You said we'd prove something that way because Laurel wouldn't go near a horse. She must have forgotten. I wish she had been—" Mrs. Randolph's voice sounded regretful.

Trina opened her eyes again and saw the old lady standing in the doorway, leaning on a cane. It was the first time she had seen her up. So Riff had told her that Trina was an imposter and the old lady had been testing her when she suggested a ride.

The voices faded and she closed her eyes again. She must have slept a long time. When she lifted her heavy lids, late afternoon sunshine slanted through the chintz-curtained windows. She moved her body and every muscle ached. With an effort she rose and slipped out of bed.

She must get away from here. Every moment near Riff was sheer torture.

It seemed to take hours to get into her clothes. Every few moments she would feel dizzy and have to rest. She packed her bag and, carrying it, slowly made her way from the room down the steps. When she got into her car she had to sit still for a moment until the dizziness passed again. There was no need to see Mrs. Randolph. An interview now would only be painful to them both. When she returned to New York she would write a brief note of apology.

The hot sun was shining down on her bare head. She wished the top of the car were not down. Perhaps she would get it fixed at a filling station on the way. Her fingers fumbled with the car keys, found the right one and inserted it. She kicked the starter once and its sound merged with the buzzing of insects nearby and the sound of the wind in the trees. Perhaps she shouldn't have tried to run away so soon. Perhaps— The gentle blackness engulfed her again.

Trina moved her head lazily and buried her face deeper in the firm tweed shoulder that was faintly redolent of tobacco and good leather and shaving cream. Then she realized it was a masculine shoulder, not a pillow, and her eyes flew open.

"So you were going to run away," Riff accused.

"I can't stay now." She fumbled in her purse and handed him the crumpled telegram.

"She's always sending people riding off madly in all directions," he said half angrily, half humorously. "Sometimes the end is tragic, but this time it won't be."

"I'm sorry I've been so much trouble. Tell Mrs. Randolph I'm sorry." She moved away from the haven of his arms. But he pulled her back.

"You're going to keep quiet and listen to me. When I thought you were hurt, I knew that nothing else mattered but you. Although I hadn't known you existed until yesterday, although I had hated you, thinking you were someone else, my whole world would be different without you." With his forefinger he tilted her chin up so that she would look into his face. "I'm trying to tell you I love you, Trina."

"I've already told you that," she replied with a giggle.

He hushed her trembling mouth with a kiss. Then he lifted her out of the car and carried her into the house. "We must tell Mrs. Randolph."

A bright faced Martha met them at the steps. "Mrs. Randolph already knows. She said the city hall don't stay open all night and you better make mighty sure that the young lady don't get away."

"And that, my dear, is an excellent idea," Riff said with a grin as he gathered Trina into his arms again.

A Date For Tonight

By R L. LATHROP

In one night Melissa lost a dream and acquired a fiancé!

IT WAS the second time within fifteen minutes that the tall red-headed man strolled past the corner where Melissa had taken her early morning station. Again he dropped a dime in her coin box and picked one of the tiny blue white lapel ribbons from her basket. This had been his morning procedure for six days in succession.

She gave him a smile. Mill City's Hospital For Crippled Children was another ten cents to the good, and he was not unattractive. A tall, lean young man, he had flaming red hair, a thin alert face and twinkling gray eyes. He was not, however, Melissa Fortnum's dream boy.

She focused her attention upon the entrance to the Bachelor Club a half block down the street. At any moment Wayne Compton would be coming out on his way to the office. He would have to pass her corner. That was why she had volunteered for eight o'clock duty at this particular station.

She waited another ten minutes and collected ten dimes. She had the equipment to arouse the generosity of male passers-by. Shoulder-length tawny gold hair, topaz-colored eyes that seemed to reflect the May sunlight. Her slim rounded figure was smoothly displayed in a soft gray suit accented by violet scarf and gloves. She wore no hat and her bright hair blew distractingly in the caressing spring breeze that swept across the city from the Mississippi.

Melissa was not feeling the soft caress of the breeze at the moment. She was feeling only anxiety because Wayne had not yet put in an appearance. Could she have missed him somehow? It was common knowledge that, although the office was not officially open on Saturdays, he never failed to spend the morning behind his desk.

That was Wayne Compton, her employer. Her dream man!

He was an extravagant dream, she knew. But people had conquered hopeless odds before, she told herself staunchly. That was why she was standing on a street corner at nine o'clock in the morning, soliciting funds in the hospital campaign.

Her breath caught sharply. Wayne was just emerging from the entrance to his club. He came down the street in her direction. Punctual as a time clock.

Surely he could not pass her by again. The law of averages demanded that he notice her just one time out of six. Regularly, she had stood there every morning all week from eight until nine, at which time she had had to make a mad dash for the office to be, perhaps, five minutes late. Just as regularly, Wayne Compton had walked past, without a glance in her direction.

He approached her briskly, immaculate as usual. Solidly built, with a firm strong jaw and determined blue eyes, a freshly barbered look and decisive step, he was every bit the rising young executive. To Melissa, he was every bit of everything.

He was abreast of her.

Desperately, she cried, "Hospital Fund, Sir?"

His head turned and he regarded her blankly. Then his face broke in astonishment.

"My word! Miss Fortnum!"

She felt herself grow hot all over. It was as though he had caught her panhandling. Wayne recovered from his surprise quickly and observed the bright red letters on her coin box.

"Oh, yes, Hospital Fund. Most commendable, Miss Fortnum," he said, and gave her a smile that did not mean a thing. He drew out a dime, dropped it into her box and proceeded on his resolute way. He did not stop for the lapel ornament which she had envisioned pinning on him. personally.

Melissa could have cried. For six months she had worked in the same office with Wayne, silently worshipping him. He was the only son and heir of old T. B. Compton, founder and owner of the great Compton Northwest Flour Mills. And Wayne took his responsibilities seriously. Too seriously, Melissa thought sometimes. She knew she was not exactly an ugly duckling. The eyes of lesser and some major deities in the Compton hierarchy had warmed to the combination of tawny gold hair and a Varga figure. But the only notice that Wayne had taken of her in six months was, "Good morning, Miss Fortnum. Thank you, Miss Fortnum. Thank you very much, Miss Fortnum."

He was a machine in the office, and she had sought for a way to bring herself to his attention outside. When the week's campaign for the Hospital Fund had been announced, Melissa had seen her chance. Most of the solicitation work was handled by debutante Junior Leaguers but when Melissa had presented herself and asked for eight o'clock duty, she had been greeted warmly by the committee of society matrons. Cynically, she realized that this was only because most of the debs were snuggling down for a morning nap at that hour. It did not matter, if it meant the chance that Wayne Compton would see her as a human being.

Obviously, maddeningly, he had not. She had not made a dent on his perceptions. After waiting patiently before his club for five straight mornings without getting so much as a smile for her efforts, when he finally did notice her under protest, his only comment was, "Most commendable, Miss Fortnum."

IT WAS enough to make any girl cry. She saw the lapel ribbon, that she had extracted from her basket and was foolishly holding in her hand, through a blur of tears. She blinked hard.

"What's the matter, baby?" asked a bantering voice at her elbow. "Here's another dime. You can pin your pretty bow on me."

Furious embarrassment dried Melissa's amber eyes. She turned wrathfully to look up into twinkling gray eyes that seemed to be laughing at her every turbulent thought.

"What—" She began indignantly.

"Avery is the name," he told her blandly. "But I'd like to have you call me Ched—if if you say it in the right tone of voice."

"Go away!" She glared at him forbiddingly. "I'm busy."

"Busy carrying a torch that the lug can't see," he said. "Your tale of woe was written all over your pretty puss when that stuffed shirt gave you the brush-off, and I couldn't help—"

"I haven't any tale of woe," Melissa snapped. "And he's no stuffed shirt. Now will you go away, please?"

Gray eyes danced down at her and a quizzical smile curved humorous lips. "Tell you what," he said. "I'll go away on one condition—that you go to the Hospital Fund dance with me tonight."

Melissa was about to say, "Certainly not!" when she suddenly had an inspiration.

The dance that night at the Lafayette Hotel, which had the city's largest and most luxurious ballroom, celebrated the formal closing of the drive for hospital funds. It was one of the high lights of the Mill City social season. Everyone of major or minor importance in town would be there, including Wayne Compton. His private secretary had heard him invite Justine Cole and reported it to the office force. That would not be so good, Wayne and Justine.

Justine Cole was Mill City's Number One deb, and Melissa had tried hard to dislike her but simply could not. No one could dislike Justine. She was just too nice a person, in spite of being terribly rich and outrageously pretty. And, as if that were not

"If you want to make an entrance, you'd better wait a few minutes," he said.

enough for one girl, she had Wayne Compton jumping through hoops for her. The strange thing about her, in Melissa's eyes, was that Justine did not seem to realize how lucky she was on the latter count.

Melissa sighed as she pictured herself in Justine's dainty sandals, going to the dance tonight with Wayne. A quite impossible aspiration. But she could go to the dance. Opportunity stood, tall and red-headed, in front of her.

"Have you tickets?" she asked, sparring for time.

His grin deepened. "I—er—work at the hotel. Don't worry, baby. I can get us in. Will do?"

Melissa had made it a rule to steer clear of pick-ups. She gave Ched Avery a swift and frank appraisal. He did not look like a wolf. He looked like a more than ordinarily attractive young man who had not long been out of the Armed Forces. There was something about the way he wore his well-cut tweeds and his tan which could have come only from long weathering. He was probably at loose ends. It would not hurt her to go to the dance with him.

She had, indeed, seen him so many times the past week that he was beginning to seem like an old acquaintance. In fact, the first time he had dropped a dime, she had had the impression that she had encountered him before. It was possible. Mill City was a big city, but it was no New York or Chicago.

Ched suffered her inspection with good grace. "I have a filling in one of my molars," he observed. "And the AAF removed my tonsils. Aside from that I'm sound of wind and limb. You'll make no mistake letting me take you to that dance. It will be a splendid chance to show the snooty boy friend that you get around, too.

That had been exactly Melissa's thought, and she was honest with him. "That's the only reason I'm going to let you take me," she told him. "Do you still want to take me, on that basis?"

"Who am I to quibble about pennies from Heaven?" said Ched. "Where do I collect you?"

She gave him the name of the hotel for women where she had a room, and he promised to pick her up at ten. The dance was starting fashionably late. He dropped another dime in her box.

Melissa watched him until he turned the corner. She wondered what he did at the swank Lafayette Hotel. He was smooth in his off-hand fashion. He was probably a desk clerk. She should have found out more about him. It had been a crazy way to make a date, but somehow she could summon up no apprehension. She felt only pleasantly excited.

It was time to close her station. She was glad it was not a working day. She decided to go home and do her hair and nails and concentrate upon what she was going to wear tonight. It had better be good. It was the chance of a lifetime to make an impression on Wayne Compton outside the office, and it promised to be much more fun than standing on a street corner asking for donations.

MELISSA WAS ready a half hour before ten o'clock. Waiting for Ched, she surveyed herself anxiously. Her dress had cost a full week's salary but it was worth it, she decided. Black chiffon, romantic but smooth, with a drifting waltz-time skirt and an off-the-shoulder bodice. She had brushed her tawny gold hair into a softly rolled cascade. Her topaz eyes gleamed warmly between dark, gold-tipped lashes.

She nodded into her mirror, decisively. She would do. She removed a white lapin evening jacket from its place in the closet. It had been a gift from her father and mother when she left her little upstate hometown. The darlings must have pictured her stepping into the social whirl of Mill City.

Her telephone rang. It was the desk clerk announcing Ched. He awaited her in the sedate little lobby below. He whistled when she stepped out of the self-operating lift.

"Hubba, hubba!"

"Don't you know the wolf call went out with the war?" She tried to be stern. Secretly she was pleased with his approval.

She moved past him to the sidewalk, noticing that he was something rather special himself in evening clothes. He was the tall slim type that wore them well. Ched opened the door of a car and Melissa's eyebrows made a delicate invisible arch. He was driving a smart convertible. She decided that it must be borrowed. Hotel

guests sometimes loaned cars to employees in return for favors. It did not matter. It was the kind of car in which to go to an important dance.

In the parking lot behind the great hotel, he motioned away the attendant who would have taken his keys. He told him familiarly, "Amscray, Tim." He took a cigarette case from his pocket. He seemed in no hurry to leave the convertible.

"Let's have a smoke before we go in," he suggested. And then, putting his own interpretation on her uneasy glance around, he told her, "The brawl has started but, if you want to make an entrance, you'd better wait a few minutes. Compton won't be there yet probably. He went to dinner party at his girl friend's."

He lighted two cigarettes, handed her one, let his arm slide along the back of the seat. He did not touch her immediately, but Melissa had the disturbing awareness that he might and the even more disturbing suspicion that she would not mind too much. Moonlight spilled on his flaming head and cast interesting shadows on the planes of his face.

"You seem to know a lot about Mr. Compton's doing," she said nervously.

"Since he seems to be the big noise in your life, I've made it my business to find out about him," Ched said unabashed. "But is he? You're really serious about the guy? It's not just a bobby-sox notion?"

Abruptly, his arm about which she had been worrying was tight about her shoulders and he was pulling her to him. His gray eyes bored into her topaz ones, strangely earnest. And the light note was gone from his voice.

"I'm not a bobby-soxer," Melissa said. "I know my own mind."

Her voice was all the more firm because suddenly, while she might know her mind, she was not in the least sure of her body, and her heart. Ched had both his arms around her. They had made a natural circle in which she wanted to stay. Her heart took up the excited beat of his heart. His gray eyes held hers, and she had a sensation of drowning deliciously.

She protested when he bent his head.

"Stop saving yourself for the little man who wasn't there," he said, holding her firmly.

Anger sparkled, penetratingly and unexpectedly, in his eyes. It roused Melissa to defiance. She lifted her head and her mouth met his in a combined surge of answering anger and desire. The anger faded. It was lost in wonder that mounted and mounted. It was inexplicable, it was frightening.

She pushed him from her, in a panic; shrank back back in the seat. "You shouldn't have done that," she said unsteadily.

"Maybe not." Ched sounded discouraged. "It looks as though I didn't prove anything."

Melissa wanted to ask him what he was trying to prove, but he was locking the car. He helped her out then, and they made their way around to the front entrance of the Lafayette. Crossing the lobby, en route to the grand ballroom, they were stopped by a bellboy, resplendent in the forest green, gold-braided uniform of the hotel.

"One hour, Ched? Okay?" he asked crytically.

"Okay, Paul. And, before I forget, here are the keys to the jalopy." Ched tossed him the keys that he had refused to give to the parking lot attendant. He guided Melissa toward the ballroom without making any explanation of the incident.

The dance was well under way. Automatically, Melissa looked around for Wayne. He was not hard to find. His carriage, the turn of his head, his every motion, was familiar to her from long and wistful watching in the office. She was vaguely and unreasonably surprised that he did not look different on the gala dance floor. In evening clothes, he was still every bit the rising young executive. She glanced at Ched in involuntary comparison. He wore evening clothes the way they should be worn, in the debonair, man-about-town manner.

Wayne was dancing with Justine Cole, and the orchestra was playing *All Through The Night,* one of Melissa's favorite numbers. Briefly she wished that she, instead of Justine, were dancing it with Wayne. She forgot her discontent in surprise suddenly. Wayne looked as if he were enjoying himself but Justine appeared frankly bored! How could she? wondered Melissa. She decided that it must be a pose.

"Dance?" Ched's voice said.

HE TOOK her into his arms competently. He was a marvelous dancer. Giving herself up to music and his sure guidance, she ceased to think of Wayne and Justine. Unreasoningly, she was a little annoyed to glance up and find them directly beside her and Ched. Either out of perverseness or because he wanted to please her, Ched must have danced her right up to them.

Wayne looked a trifle startled when he saw Melissa. His alert blue eyes slid over her, and a gleam of appreciation brightened them.

"Oh, hello, Miss—Melissa," he said uncertainly.

He gave her an awkward smile that Melissa returned just as awkwardly. She envied Justine who was her usual easy self.

She said, "Hi, Melissa, Ched! How goes it?"

She was a small girl. She had shoulder-length red-gold hair, startling green eyes and a tantalizing sprinkling of freckles on her pert nose. She was said to be high-handed in her dealings with men but she was tremendously popular. She knew, and called by first name, everyone with whom she came in contact. It was not remarkable that she should hail Ched, since she appeared often at the Lafayette.

Ched said carelessly. "Hi, yourself. Be seeing you later."

He danced Melissa away again. She was conscious of Wayne's eyes following her with an aware look in them. To her surprise she realized that she was only mildly thrilled.

"Satisfied?" Ched asked sourly.

Melissa frowned at him. The evening was going even better than she had hoped but her emotions were not responding according to plan.

The music stopped and Ched said, "I'll have to leave you for a little while now, sweet. But I'll be back as soon as I can. You won't be alone long."

She followed the direction of his casual nod and saw Wayne bearing down upon her purposely. Ched took himself off. He was being just a little too tactful, she thought.

"My dance, Melissa!"

Wayne claimed her masterfully, and they moved out on the floor to the rhythm of *What More Can I Ask For.*

She should have nothing more to ask for, thought Melissa, but dancing with Wayne was not quite all that she had expected. She missed Ched Avery's casual grace, his careful unstudied guidance. Wayne made more of a business of dancing. He seemed to execute his steps by blue print. His opening remark, however, was most decidedly not of the office variety.

"You know, Melissa," he said wonderingly, "you're lovely. How have I missed noticing it all these months that you've been a part of my life?"

"It happens frequently." Melissa's voice was dry.

She discovered Ched then. Flaming red head held high, gray eyes laughing down, he was dancing with Justine.

Fierce blind resentment against them both surged up in Melissa. It was she whom he had brought to the dance. It was unforgivable for him to have walked off and left her for another girl. As for Justine, was she trying to have every man in the place for herself? They made a good pair, Melissa decided sulkily. They were both red-heads and, evidently, used to having their own way.

She finished her dance with Wayne, and they were leaving the dance floor when Melissa caught Justine beckoning her frantically in the direction of the powder room. Ched had disappeared again.

What in the world goes on, she wondered.

She made a vague excuse to Wayne and followed Justine, puzzled. In the powder room, Justine drew her to a chaise longue in one corner where they could talk privately.

"Look, honey. I wonder if you'd do me a terrific favor?" Justine was tense and excited.

"What is it?" Melissa remained noncommital and wary.

"Please!" Justine caught her wrist in a small hot hand. "You see, I'm eloping tonight, and I'm really in a kind of spot."

"Eloping!" Melissa cried.

It would naturally be with Wayne, and that meant that she had impressed herself upon him too late. But why should Justine and Wayne elope when their whole world was cheering them on?

"Sure enough." Justine nodded happily. "With an ex-G. I. We've been in love for

ages, but the family are stuffy about him, because he was too busy fighting a war to get his future all charted out—like Wayne Compton. He claimed exemption, you know, on account of being in essential industry." She sounded faintly contemptuous.

"Anyhow, family or no family, I'm marrying the man I love tonight. That's why I came to this brawl with Wayne—so they'd think I was in good company. And now I'm stuck with him."

Stuck with Wayne? Melissa digested that thoughtfully.

"It will be a nuisance," Justine went on. "But would you take Wayne off my hands for the rest of the evening? I know he's a drip, and you'll be bored stiff. Maybe I shouldn't ask it of you but a girl doesn't get married every night. And I don't want Wayne stewing around about me. You can keep him amused, I know. After he got an eyeful of you tonight, he could hardly wait to get a dance with you. Can do, pet?"

"I'll try," Melissa said.

This was the break that she had been praying for. This was her big chance. But, somehow, now that it was accomplished, the prospect lacked the luster that it had held but a few hours before. She wondered who the ex-G. I. was whom Justine was going to marry.

Icy conviction struck her. Ched! It must be Ched Avery. He had been dancing with Justine just a few minutes before and he was gone now—doubtless to make arrangements for the elopment. Melissa could not for the life of her tell why but the thought of Ched and Justine eloping left her with an empty feeling in the pit of her stomach.

SHE CUT short Justine's profuse thanks and went out to find Wayne. His blue eyes lighted most flatteringly as he saw her crossing the floor toward him.

"I was just about to send out a posse," he said. "How about a drink or a sandwich?"

Melissa claimed that she craved both. It would be a way of keeping him out of Justine's way for an appreciable time.

A bar and long buffet table had been set up in a banquet hall adjoining the ballroom. The hotel had turned itself out for the occasion. Waiters from the dining room moved swiftly to and fro with plates. Bellboys suavely offered lights for cigarettes and helped women guests off with their wraps. Wayne seated Melissa and found Martinis for them. He brought out his cigarettes.

"Light, sir?"

The polite voice had a familiar ring. She looked up sharply, and choked back an exclamation. Bending assiduously over Wayne was Ched Avery. He wore the forest green, gold-braided uniform of a Lafayette bellboy!

He had excused himself to go to work, not to elope with Justine. That was Melissa's first thought, and it was accompanied by illogical heady relief, that was succeeded by dismay. Wildly she prayed that Wayne would not look at the polite attendant at his elbow and realize that her escort to the dance had been a bellboy. It would be too humiliating.

He held a match to Wayne's cigarette. Over his oblivious head, Ched's gray eyes, very steady and faintly challenging, met hers. Abruptly, Melissa was ashamed of herself. She had come to the dance with a bellboy. Let Wayne make of it what he would.

She shook back her tawny gold hair and spoke clearly and proudly. "Hello, Ched. Going to be tied up long on this job?"

Wayne's head jerked up. He stared at Ched incredulously. "You're—" he began.

Ched paid no attention to him. His gaze was on Melissa. His thin tanned face was transfigured. His eyes glowed warm and deep and very bright.

"Thank you. I'll be back soon, Melissa."

He gave her a brilliant smile and moved on to the next couple. Wayne turned his indignant astonishment upon her.

"You came with him!" he said. "You came with a bellboy."

He made Ched sound like an intolerable. Melissa lifted a defiant little chin and was about to tell him that whom she came with was her own concern. Then she remembered Justine and stopped herself. Justine would probably need more time to make a safe and complete getaway.

"A girl from out of town has a hard time getting places." Melissa made herself a little pathetic, temporizing. "She doesn't get a chance to meet men like you socially."

It was rank corny flattery but Wayne ate it up, and beamed upon her fondly. "Finish your drink," he commanded. "Then let's get out of here and find a place where we can talk."

Melissa smiled to herself. She wished that Justine could see how expertly she was handling him. She let him guide her from the banquet hall to the balcony that ran half way around the ball room and was deserted except for a few elderly hotel guests who were avidly watching the dancers. Halfway up the wide carpeted stairs Wayne had a guilty belated recollection of Justine.

He said, "I wonder where Justine is? Her mother asked me to keep a strict eye on her."

"The last I saw of her . . ." Melissa improvised wildly, "she was looking for a maid. I think she's still in the powder room."

"Oh. I guess she's all right then. Anyhow Justine can take care of herself. She's not like you."

He led her to a far corner of the balcony where there was a deep soft divan.

"You need someone who knows his way around to take care of you," he said. "I should have realized it before. You're too lovely to be unprotected. Imagine having to pick men out of gutters—a girl like you."

Melissa stiffened. "I didn't pick Ched out of any gutter."

"Of course not, Melissa." He was soothing. "What I mean is that from now on you're going to have fun. We're going to have fun, you and I."

He put his arms around her, but inexplicably Melissa suddenly didn't want him to kiss her. She moved away abruptly.

Wayne raised his eyebrows at her protest, and then seemed to resign himself. "There'll be other times," he said. "Oh, Melissa, I'm looking forward to showing you the town. Of course, there'll be a few places that we can't go because, well, I'm just about as good as engaged to Justine."

Melissa gave an angry gasp that changed to a smothered laugh. She stifled an impulse to tell him what Justine was very likely doing at that very moment.

Wayne went on, "but even though we'll have to be a little careful about our playing around, my dear, you'll never again be driven to going out with a lowly bellboy."

"Melissa sat up straight in her wrath. "Any bellboy is worth a dozen of you, Wayne Compton! Ched Avery is worth a gross."

"Ched Avery?" The name seemed to distract Wayne from her denunciation. "Who's talking about Ched Avery?"

"I am," Melissa said, "and so were you. Ched Avery is the bellboy—the man who brought me tonight."

"My dear child, some one's been ribbing you." Wayne laughed patronizingly. "I've never met Ched Avery but I've heard about him. He made quite a name for himself in the Air Force and, what's more important, his father owns this hotel!"

MELISSA stared at him without seeing him. A jig-saw puzzle was taking shape in front of her. Little things about Ched, that had been confusing began to make sense. His expensive clothes and car, his familiarity with Justine Cole, the hotel attendants' friendliness touched by respect. Ched was the Ched Avery about whom Wayne was talking.

And Ched had ribbed her, beautifully, cruelly. She stood up, white and shaking. Her recent anger at Wayne was banished from her mind. The anger that was gathering in her against Ched went to the very core of her. It was born of deep wrenching hurt.

"Where are you going?" Wayne was startled and aggrieved. "You act as if I'd insulted you."

"You couldn't insult me," she told him bitingly. "But you might bore me to death, as you evidently did Justine."

"Justine?" Ambiguities were coming too fast for Wayne. "What's she got to do with it. Where is she?"

"Across the state line by this time, I hope," Melissa said and left him to think it over alone.

Her one thought was to escape from the dance and the hotel and never again see Ched Avery. The prince in disguise amusing himself; King Cophetua condescending to the beggar maid! But he would laugh alone, she vowed silently.

Blinking back hot tears, Melissa hurried down to the lounge and the check room. Her usually sure, slim fingers fumbled in her evening bag for her coat check. She

found it, after what seemed an eternity, and was starting to give it to the girl at the counter. A polite voice stayed her.

"Let me, Miss."

The check disappeared from her fingers. Ched Avery handed it to the attendant. "I'll take my top coat at the same time." He was still in the green and gold bellhop's uniform.

Fuming but helpless, Melissa could do nothing but let him retrieve her lapin jacket. He draped it over her shoulders and walked with her to the entrance. There she stopped.

"You've gone far enough," she said flatly. "This has gone far enough, Mister Avery."

"So you know," he murmured. "I thought as much when you stormed downstairs. But, come on! We're blocking traffic."

Willy-nilly, he hurried her through the revolving doors to the sidewalk beneath the marquee. He asked the doorman to whistle up a cab.

"Sorry." He grinned apologetically at Melissa. "But I loaned my bus to Paul to go to his wedding."

Her amber eyes flew wide. "Paul? That was the boy that you talked to as we came in."

"Justine's husband, by this time." He was climbing into the cab after her as he spoke. "A good Joe. I flew with him in the Pacific. That's why I loaned him the car and volunteered to take his place working tonight."

The cab driver turned around. "Where to?"

"You might try the Falls of Minnehaha," said Ched. "How far?"

"Ten bucks."

Ched handed him a ten dollar bill. "I think it may be worth it."

Carefully, he did not meet Melissa's amber eyes. He talked determinedly of Paul and Justine.

"Paul's going back to college to get a degree in meteorology. He started it in the AAF. When he's through he'll be okay. Weathermen make good money. He has a Quonset hut lined up on the campus for him and Justine. That's what she needs—a G. I. veteran-student husband, meals to cook, shirts to launder. That's what will make her happy."

"You believe in treating the women ruggedly," Melissa said. Her resentment was disappearing.

"It depends on the woman." Ched slid an arm around her casually, so casually that she let it remain. "I believe in cuddling my own."

The arm around her was no longer causal, nor was the mouth that claimed hers. His voice, a mere whisper, told her, "I said, 'That's for me!', the first time I saw you in the Hospital Fund headquarters."

She drew back and looked at him thoughtfully. His gray eyes twinkled merrily, the way they had the day he had first spoken to her. His hair was crisp and bright, the kind of hair it would be fun to run her hand through gently, tenderly, she thought wistfully. But she did not remember ever having seen him before. She said hesitantly, "I did see you before?"

"I saw you, but you didn't see me." He corrected her. "You were too busy trying to persuade that frozen-faced committee to let you work an extra hour a day. I wondered why and set about finding out from you."

"You knew I wasn't a debutante, a member of your social set?"

"You were prettier, and had more savvy than any deb." He gathered her back to him. "Do you know what song ran through my head when I saw you?"

She shook her tawny gold head, waiting. He hummed softly. *"The Girl That I Marry—"*

She was quiescent against his heart. A new dream, a glorious dream was unfolding. His voice made it reality.

He said, "Tonight, I wanted to carry you off right then and there, when you claimed me in front of your stuffed shirt. I knew you were startled by my bellboy uniform, but you were so very loyal, darling Melissa baby."

Their lips met again. They wandered through a dream world that Ched turned into reality by observing lazily, "I'll bet I'm the first guy who ever got a wife for a dime."

Melissa straightened up. "Several dimes! Don't underrate me."

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She stopped suddenly. David and Megan stood close together, completely absorbed in each other.

By CHRISTINE YOUNG

Dreams Do Come True

THE RAIN was coming down in torrents. A hard, driving April rain. It was making rivers of the city streets, golden rivers under the early lamplight. Judy Witherell, clutching her scarlet umbrella tightly, looked at them in dismay. She thought, I should have brought my gondola! Oh, David, wait for me, won't you? Don't you dare not be waiting! I couldn't help it, could I, that the subway was jammed?

Her vivid young face glowed and her dark

eyes danced in anticipation. From under the pixie hood of her smart little white ulster, soft tendrils of coppery hair curled damply about her cheeks. Blithely she splashed through puddles, unheeding. To the rest of the hurrying pedestrians, bound toward Bartholomew Hospital, it was doubtless just a cold and disagreeably stormy night. But to Judy it was exciting. Life was a completely delectable affair.

She told herself blissfully now, "I'm home again, really home. Rachel is better. And almost any minute now it will be really spring. Daffodils and tulips in bloom, buds bursting and everything!" Her heart took another flight upward. "Oh, tonight's the night, I know. I've felt it in my bones all day. It's really going to happen. David is going to find a minute longer than usual to be with me!"

David. She whispered his name and happiness, wild and unreasoning, caught her up. "Oh, David," she implored him, silently, her eyes starry. "Skip your last patient and pay some real attention to me. You want to. You know you do. Your eyes tell me even if your lips don't dare to."

She knew. And why wouldn't she? From the time Judy had been old enough to blink her incredibly long lashes, a curly-headed imp of a child, men had flocked around in droves. Why shouldn't this tall young Doctor David Leavens, the new resident physician at Bartholomew's do the same?"

She saw him now, in imagination—gay, vital, the most exciting person in all the world. "So you're Judy. It's high time you showed up," he'd exclaimed, that first night by old Rachel's bedside, where she had rushed straight from the plane. He had looked down at her with blue eyes bright and smiling, frank curiosity in his face. He had added, more soberly, but with an assurance that was such a comfort, "Your grandmother will be better now that you're here. Don't worry too much."

"I haven't, not with you at the helm, David!" she whispered now, as she raced along in the rain. "I'd trust you with the sun, moon and stars. Isn't it awful? I've known you less than a week; I've seen you only a little while every evening! Yet I feel this way, all on tiptoe and excited!"

She tried to jump a puddle and one small rubber-boot emerged half-filled with water. She gave a little squeal but scurried on. No time now to stop. David was waiting. And Rachel, too, was doubtless worrying about her. She was probably right this instant making life miserable for Hilda, the night nurse.

Poor Rachel. Judy's gay young face went tender. Her grandmother had really been very ill. Much more seriously ill than her attorney's telegram had indicated when it reached Judy in Florida the week before. The words of it danced before her now. A fall on the ice, Brent Somers had wired, resulting in compound fractures of hip and leg and complications.

The complications had meant her heart. Judy knew, and a knife had suddenly stabbed her own hearrt, knowing. It hadn't taken the accompanying telegram from Betsy and Blake to send her flying north. Betsy, her grandmother's housekeeper, and Blake, the chauffeur, were calm and undramatic always. If they felt she should come, it was serious.

She had rushed to catch the first available plane, leaving behind her a world of gayety and warmth and glamour. Turquoise seas and skies and palms swaying in silvery moonlight. The luxurious, lazy life at her mother's handsome villa at Palm Beach. She had had three months of swimming and sun-bathing and sailing. Dancing every night under the southern stars with Rufus Gordon, a sun-bronzed, carefree young man for a playmate.

Rufus vehemently deplored her leaving. "You're out of your mind to leave all this!" he declared. "I need you more than your grandmother does. You know I do, baby."

"Oh, of course. And you'll simply die without me!" she retorted. "I can imagine. With all these glamour girls around."

That wasn't a heartless way to talk, not with Rufus. He had been in love with her for years. But not inconsolably. Even his gloom and her mother's protests failed to sway her. Their last moment, there by the plane, flashed through Judy's mind now.

"It's utter nonsense, your going!" her mother declared shortly. "All this to-do over a little fall. Your grandmother is as strong as an ox, even at seventy-seven. She always has been. And what earthly good can you do? She has a brace of trained nurses and specialists and everything that money can buy for her comfort. Why can't Brent Somers take care of things? But

you've spoiled them all, Judy. They think, as she does, that they own you body and soul."

Well, it wasn't so bad a thing to be owned by people like Blake and Betsy, and good old Brent. Judy's soft young chin had set dangerously. But she hadn't said, "I'm going because I want to go and because I love her!" She hadn't bothered, because what would be the use? Her mother had never liked the Witherells. She wouldn't understand. From the time of her father's death, when Judy was ten, her mother had severed all but the most formal connections with old Mrs. Witherell, and had proceeded to live her own life with her own more cosmopolitan friends. Winters in Palm Beach, summers traveling, or on Long Island.

"Cafe society!" old Rachel often snorted caustically.

Judy sighed. "And me bouncing around all over the globe to be with her when she wants me. When all the time all I want is to stay put in the old house in New England where my roots are. And especially now with Grandmother so ill and needing me."

That she had needed her had been apparrent from that first moment, when, rushing straight from the airport to the hospital, Judy had whispered softly, "Hello,, darling! What in the world are you up to all trussed up in bed like this?"

"I know! Disgusting, isn't it?" her grandmother had retorted, weakly. But her fine old hand had closed over Judy's soft one, and an unaccustomed tear had slipped down her wrinkled cheek.

It was the tear that had unmanned Judy. She had never seen her grandmother cry before. "The Witherells don't!" Rachel often declared, haughtily, her head high. "Tears are weakness. Take your blows with your chin up, Judith. Only weaklings cry."

That night outside in the corrider, David had been waiting. He said, quickly, "Here, here, now, none of this!"

He handed her a handkerchief and obligingly looked away while she wiped her eyes. Then he said matter-of-factly, "You're tired, aren't you? You've had a hard trip and too much anxiety. Get home and go to bed. Don't worry. Just don't come back tomorrow unless you can stop looking quite so ready to haunt a house! How about a smile?"

Judy smiled now, remembering. "But he didn't mean it!" sang her heart. "His eyes were concerned. He was just trying to put some steel into my backbone. I needed it too."

THAT WAS the way it began. A week ago. Six days through which she had lived counting the hours shamelessly until she could be with David Leavens, if only long enough to say "Hello". No wonder she decided she must be crazy. But it was fun to be crazy this way!

She paused for an instant, staring up at Bartholomew's. Ablaze with lights, it towered to the heavens, a world within a world. Somewhere within those chaste white walls, David was going competently about his business. The business of life and death.

Drama and grimness and tragedy. And romance! Judy thought, her heart beating faster. No wonder David loved his work. It was marvelous to be of use in the world, helping people to live and be well and happy. A far cry from loafing on a southern beach, lapping up the sun. No wonder he seemed different from Rufus! And from any other man she had ever known!

She went through the gates now and across the concourse, past the mass of closely parked cars. The waiting-room, beyond the big revolving doors, was mobbed, as usual. She stopped a moment to shake the raindrops from her umbrella and catch her breath.

As she did so a passing nurse stared at her and, to Judy's amazement, frowned.

She was an outstandingly pretty nurse. Puzzled, Judy stared after her. The girl disappeared down a dimly-lighted corridor, her head, with its coronet of dark braids, high and proud.

"Well!" Judy shrugged, philosophically. "I'm sorry if I sprinkled her. I didn't mean to. But maybe she glared because she's just tired. Maybe she's had a tough day. A nurse's life is no bed of roses."

But still, most of them could smile. This girl had looked really hostile. As though her thoughts were dark and disagreeable. Yet she was such a beauty!

In the elevator, however, Judy promptly forgot her. "Ninth floor, please." She smiled.

Sam, her favorite elevator-man, beamed at her. "Nice night for ducks, Miss Witherell," he said, coughing a little. "A little late tonight, aren't you? Get stuck in the traffic?"

"Oh, no. I didn't drive in tonight," she said. Sam was a sweet old man and every night they exchanged pleasantries this way. But suddenly Judy frowned. "You didn't get it!" she accused him, sternly. "The medicine Doctor Leavens told you about. Your cough is worse."

"Oh, no, it isn't. And I got the medicine. He saw to that," Sam sighed. "He's a tyrant, that one. None of the other doctors around here would bother with a no-account like me. But Doctor Leavens, he's like you —different somehow. Interested, if you know what I mean."

Judy's heart swelled with pride. As if she had any right to feel such a personal thing as pride about David! She said, "I know! He's wonderful, isn't he?"

The elevator came to a stop, the door slid open. She stepped out, but Sam said unexpectedly, "You won't mind an old man's advice, will you, Miss Judy."

He looked suddenly anxious. But determined.

Puzzled, Judy said, "Why no, of course not, Sam. Why?"

"Well, it's just that I notice a lot, these old eyes don't miss much. Maybe I shouldn't say it but I see them all, you know. All the young things conniving to get his attention. The nurses, and so on. He kids with 'em. He's friendly, a regular chap. But—"

"But what?" She helped him out, her cheeks suddenly aflame.

"I've been jitneying you two up and down for a week now and I like to see you together. Seems to me you belong. Don't pay any attention to anything you hear, Miss Judy. It won't mean anything, believe me."

"Oh. Well, thank you, Sam." She blinked. But before she could say more the door closed and Sam had vanished.

What had he meant by that? Was there gossip about David and some nurse? Her heart turned over. A hospital was always rife with gossip. It was silly to pay any attention. David was far too busy to have time for any flirting.

She felt suddenly lost and bleak. She thought, "I don't really know anything at all about you, do I, David? Except that you're gay and exciting and thoughtful, and that Grandmother thinks you're perfect. She caught her breath suddenly, "And that you've got my heart," she whispered softly.

It was true, and standing there alone, she faced it. It wasn't just a superficial thing. She was really in love, and for the first time in her life. And if David didn't return her love now it would be tragic!

She wheeled about, her bright face suddenly solemn, and made her way along the quiet corridor to her grandmother's room. She would find out tonight. If there were somebody else for David, she would manage some way to make him tell!

At her grandmother's door she paused. Hilda was there, knitting in her chair by the bedside table. She looked up and put a warning finger to her lips. Old Rachel was asleep. She looked very old and frail lying there and Judy's heart twisted.

"Is she all right?" she whispered. "Hasn't she missed me? I was afraid she would be worried and fretting."

Hilda crossed the room and joined her by the door. "She's been sleeping a lot today. She needs to." Hilda's usually cheerful face looked rather grave. "But don't feel upset. Just trot along like a good girl, and skip tonight's visit. Doctor Leavens said to tell you. Those are his orders. He was just here."

She had missed him. Judy's heart plunged. Disappointment, sharp and searing, shot through her. It must have shown in her face. Because Hilda, with a little pat, said, "He left a message for you. He asked me to have you stop in at the office for a moment."

Without waiting to ask questions, Judy was off down the corridor, puzzled, but with hope once again rearing its head. If her grandmother was really worse, David would tell her. He had waited for her, anyway!

Outside the office door she hesitated, suddenly breathless. She had been here before. The leather couch and chairs, the ivy spilling from the chintz-hung windows, were all familiar. David was sitting at the desk, poring over some sort of chart, pencil in hand. His face in profile was grim and frowning. Under the lamplight he looked tired. But his bright hair was crisp and shining and in place of the usual pro-

fessional white he wore a business suit of Oxford gray.

HE LOOKED up suddenly and saw her, a small, hesitant figure by the door. "Oh, hello, there!" He jumped to his feet and in two long strides was beside her. "So you got my message. You're late!"

He sounded as eager as she was. Somehow Judy found her voice. "I hurried as fast as I could, but the subway was crowded. Is Grandmother worse? Hilda said no, but she acted funny and I'm worried. Please, you must tell me"

His finger on her lips stopped the words. "Shush!" he frowned and it was a command, stern and definite. "Didn't you ever hear of the worry-bird? He's up all night, busy about it. I never knew such a girl! You look fourteen yet all the time you're crossing bridges."

He grinned suddenly. Judy's own laugh bubbled out and her fears slipped away as if by magic. One minute with him and all was right with her world. Very meekly she said, "Well, all right. So you didn't want to see me?"

"Of course not. How could Hilda have got such an idea!"

For a balmy instant they beamed at each other. Then, shaking his bright head, David said, "How could I not want to see you, Judy? You underrate yourself. If there's a man alive who wouldn't want to see that smile, he would be crazy! I've been counting the minutes all day, hoping you'd be free this evening. Are you? To squander an hour or so with me."

This was what she had been wanting and hoping for so passionately. He had three hours off. Her heart took wings. He wanted to spend them with her, just being blithe and carefree and gay.

"Just to hear you laugh is almost enough," he said. "You have such a contagious gurgle, Judy, so full of music. Listening to it gives a man a lift, and I certainly need one!" He sobered, abruptly.

He turned away to pick up his hat and coat. It was then that she saw again how worried and tired he looked. Her breath caught but she said, "I've all the time in the world. I'll be very glad to laugh for you, David!"

"Good! You can call me David again!" Sam was wrong. Judy's heart soared to heaven. There was no other girl standing in the way. There couldn't be, or he wouldn't be here now. He wasn't the kind to have a line. Not David!

But as they went through the waiting-room, a moment later, something happened to make her wonder again. They came face to face with the nurse Judy had encountered earlier. The striking brunette with the sultry frown. The girl's eyes blazed as her glance swept quickly from David to Judy.

"Hello!" David's voice was cheerful. "How's it going, Megan?"

"You know how!" flared the nurse. "And a lot you care!"

She passed on swiftly, and a little stunned, Judy looked at him. There was an expression on his face that made her heart stand still for an instant. Then he took her arm and said, shrugging and smiling, "Well, the brush-off! The girls here do have a rugged time, but if they can't grin and take it in stride they're licked."

He sounded matter-of-fact and casual. Judy drew a normal breath again. But she thought, Maybe he doesn't know it, but she's in love with him! That's why she glared at me tonight. She's seen us together before. Now I remember. She's the one who came into Grandmother's room once when we were talking nonsense and having fun.

Well, perhaps this was what Sam had meant. But suddenly it didn't matter. She shrugged the thought away. Tonight was hers, and nothing must spoil it. It wasn't David's fault if every woman on earth fell in love with him!

They ducked out into the rain and into his car, parked near the door, and she heard him saying. "Well, tell me where! Tonight you're the doctor. But first, do you mind if we make a little detour? I promised to deliver this package for an associate."

As she waited for him outside the shabby apartment house, on a dead-end city street, she wondered curiously what could have brought him to such a district. There were tenements all around. It would be like him, though, to be doing a kind deed for someone. A ward patient, perhaps. And whatever it was, he felt it was something necessary and important. Of that she was sure.

At last they were on their way. To the place across town that Judy had suggested

for dinner. Cocktails and dancing, too. A glamorous, lovely place. One that she knew, obviously, better than he did. Because a young doctor did not have much time for hitting the hot spots, he maintained.

"We lead a dog's life, Judy," he sighed. "All work and no play. Nothing very gay about it. But you wouldn't know, of course." His blue glance took her in and she felt suddenly shy before it. Without the raincoat and hood, hiding her tawny hair, she looked expensive, and she knew it. The string of pearls around her neck were priceless. The tweed of her soft, heathery green suit had come from Scotland. The cashmere sweater she had bought in Bermuda. But suddenly she felt apologetic and wished that she were wearing a starched white uniform!

She heard him saying, "You got that gorgeous tan on somebody's private yacht, didn't you? You're lucky, Judy. You wouldn't know what it means to go without meals, to pinch and scrape and work until you nearly drop from sheer exhaustion, would you?"

"No." She shook her head. She thought, He's comparing me with another girl! Indignation, hot and searing, stabbed her. But before she could answer, she felt his hand on hers.

"Forgive me, Judy!" he said, frowning. "This is no way to be talking. I ought to be shot. You're sitting there so sweet and lovely and shining. And I talk shop in this tiresome way. Don't let me do it anymore. It's just that I'm tied up in knots tonight, rather. Martinis, did you say?"

The waiter brought them and they drank them, smiling at each other across the little table.

BUT JUDY wasn't really smiling in her heart. Something was wrong. He was upset and troubled. "Not really relaxed or gay, at all!" she told herself. "He's just pretending, hoping I'll make him forget. Maybe it's a patient. Or maybe—"

It couldn't be Megan, the tempestuous nurse! Judy shook off the disturbing thought. It was ridiculous. David was here, with her. That should be proof enough.

But she thought, her dark eyes solemn, I know now that he knows what it means to scrape and pinch. He must think I'm just a useless, spoiled little daughter of the rich. Just somebody gay to while away an unexpected free evening with!

It was a maddening thought and she pushed it from her. They ordered dinner and suddenly the magic of being with him, began to assert its spell. The orchestra played softly, insidiously, and the candlelight wove a bright enchantment. It brought a sudden lovely intimacy to David's voice.

"Tell me about you, Judy," he said. "From the beginning."

She told him a little, as much as she dared. About the old house on the Hill and Blake and Betsy and her love for old Rachel. About the library, lined with her father's books. About her childhood holidays at the Witherell Farm, in Holliston.

But about the expensive boarding-school on the Hudson and her debut at the Waldorf Astoria, and about Sun Valley and the glamorous doings with her mother's friends, she said nothing. Nor did she mention Rufus.

David gave her small glimpses of himself. He had worked his way through medical school. He owed a great deal to his foster parents. He was repaying them, and meant to more than repay them when he was on his own.

He would do it, too. His chin set, declaring that. He looked all at once quite young and boyish.

It made him seem closer, and happiness suddenly swept Judy up. Even when he said, suddenly frowning. "Success, though, means stern application and concentration. And not many detours, Judy, like this."

What he meant by that she didn't know, exactly. Before she could start to worry, he was on his feet.

"Let's stop this. You're too easy to talk to, Judy! But now I want to dance with you. I want to see what it's like to have you in my arms!"

They went out onto the shining floor together and he took her in his arms. It was a waltz, something straight from old Vienna, ageless, forever lovely. Dancing with him was like floating on a cloud. He might have had to scramble like mad for things but somewhere along the line he had learned to dance. The perfectness of it sent the blood racing through Judy's veins.

Then, all at once, he whispered, "Judy, do you believe in dreams?"

"I don't know!" Her voice was just a breath. "I—I think so. I think they come true sometimes, don't you?"

"Yes." His arms drew her closer. "I believe that now. Because all my life I've had one particular dream. About a girl. I shouldn't tell you—tomorrow I'll probably be sorry. But tonight's tonight and you've got me bewitched. I never met that girl, Judy. I'd about given up hope. Then suddenly you walked into Bartholomew's, your lovely hair flying, your eyes so wide and frightened. I took one look and I said, 'This is it, Dave! You've found her!' "

"Oh, David!" It was just a whisper of sound.

He held her off an instant and looked down into her starry-eyed, uplifted face. "I mean it," he whispered, solemnly. "I'm not just talking, darling!"

"Oh, David, really? Really?"

He held her close. Her arm tightened about his neck and suddenly his lips met hers. He kissed her, there on the dance-floor where everyone might see. But it didn't matter, because it was as if they were alone in all the world. Judy felt that her heart would burst. He loved her! He felt as she did!

When the music ended, they made their way, hand in hand, back to their seats. The lights were going down. The floor-show was starting. David pushed in her chair.

Then she heard a voice that made her start, and suddenly freeze.

"Judy! Well, for heaven's sake! So this is the way you do it, is it? Cheer old Rachel back to health. I might have guessed."

IT WAS Rufus. In the soft glow of blue light his familiar figure disintangled itself from among the shadows. Above the immaculate dinner-coat his face, ironic, handsome was bent to hers. It was obvious that he had been drinking.

"Not glad to see me?" he exclaimed, offended. "But why not? Isn't this my native habitat when in town? You didn't think I'd be content to hang around down in Florida after you left, did you, baby? One week was enough of that. I flew up from Palm Beach last night. I have all sorts of messages from your mother for you."

All she could do was stare. Tongue-tied, hands clenched, eyes blazing. But her heart afraid. Because David had become a cool, distant stranger all at once.

It was her own voice she heard at last saying, "Rufus and I grew up together, David. He's been underfoot all my life. He isn't usually such a nuisance. She turned the full blaze of her fury upon Rufus and saw him quail. "You're really tying it on tonight, aren't you? Go on home, Rufus!"

She was ashamed, afterward, of her fury. But she nearly choked as she looked at David and saw the expression in his eyes. They must get away before there was really a scene! She said a little wildly, "Let's go, David!"

"Oh, wait a minute." It was Rufus again, still full of sociability. "Don't be mad, baby! She's cute when she's mad, though, isn't she? Got a redhead's devilish temper. Nobody like Judy. She gets like that sometimes when you try to kiss her, too. She's—quite a gal."

How they got away Judy never knew. But at last she and David were outside in his car. The cool night air brushed her hot cheeks. The stars were out and lovely. It had stopped raining. But all the lovely magic was gone.

She said, in a small, choked voice, "You don't believe that stupid nonsense, do you, David? He doesn't mean anything to me. You couldn't believe it, could you?"

"No." She heard his voice, cool and impersonal. "I don't believe it. Forget it, Judy. These little things do happen." He sounded a million miles away. "He was just pretty well lit. I should have punched his face in for him, maybe. Should I? Was that what you expected?"

"No. But he deserved it!" Her voice ended on a little wail. "He's spoiled our evening. I'm sorry." But oh, David, darling, why did you let it!" her heart cried.

She was still asking herself that when she woke up the next morning, to a blue and gold spring world. The sun shone brightly through the ruffled curtains, and birds sang lustily on the window sill.

Dully she thought, oh, why do I feel so tragic! As if the end of the world had come!

Then she remembered, and her heart began to ache. David had rushed her home and unceremoniously dropped her at the door. He hadn't said another tender word.

It had been a crisp, professional, "Thanks for a nice evening, Judy. Good night!"

He wasn't fair! Or had she just dreamed all the loveliness that had gone before? His arm about her, drawing her closer and closer. His voice whispering, huskily, "You're a dream come true—my dream!"

Perhaps I did just dream it! she thought, desolately, now. Perhaps Rufus is the reality. Thinking of Rufus, rage blazed in her again.

It was at that moment that a voice spoke from the doorway. Without even knocking, Betsy appeared. "Well, do you aim to stay in bed forever? I thought you must be dead. Not that I doubt you need the sleep—staying out all hours! How did you find your grandmother? And do you want your breakfast on a tray or do you feel able to totter downstairs?"

That was Betsy, right in form. Judy eyed her bleakly. "Grandmother is okay," she said. Then, holding her breath, "Has anybody called me yet? Anybody important?"

"No." Betsy sniffed. "Only that scalawag, Rufus Gordon. He's been on the phone every ten minutes since half-past six. What do you want me to tell him next time?"

Rufus! "Oh!" Judy said, fiercely. "Tell him I'm dead!"

She watched Betsy marching down the hall and forced herself to get out of bed, at last. She pulled on a satin dressing-gown and went to the window. She looked across the city rooftops toward Bartholomew's. Was David remembering? Or had he just been having himself a gala evening, and maybe wishing now he hadn't wasted a single moment on a shallow little play-girl like her? Tonight, perhaps, he would avoid her completely.

But she counted the moments until six o'clock just the same. She got through the day, somehow. Rufus, fortunately, did not show up. Betsy had probably put him in his place, but Judy wasn't interested enough to ask how.

She called the hospital at noon and was told that Rachel was napping. The day nurse was an uncommunicative soul.

"Does she sleep all the time?" Judy demanded, puzzled.

"A great deal of it. She has been very ill."

They think I'm a dope! thought Judy, hanging up, looking despondent. As if I didn't know she had been seriously ill! They probably tell Brent more than they do me, because lawyers are supposed to have sense and brains.

The day dragged by. She whiled away the afternoon taking Spotty, the puppy, for a walk across the Common and the Gardens. The swan-boats were out. The trees were a drift of soft and tender young green. It would be so heavenly to wander hand in hand along these familiar walks with David! To sit on a bench under a magnolia tree and toss peanuts to the birds. Anything in the world would be fun with David.

But David didn't really love her, after all. He probably thought she was just a spoiled little girl because she had been born with a silver spoon in her mouth.

"But I could work!" she told herself, storming. "Just as hard as any nurse if I had to! I'll get myself a job! I'll never go to Florida again, I'll learn to pinch and scrape—I'll spend the rest of my life trying to show him!"

SHE CALMED down enough at last to dress very carefully that night. She chose a dress of buttercup yellow crepe with gold buttons, and violets on her shoulder. She wore the mink coat, because it had turned cooler.

"You look like spring," Betsy volunteered. "But it's my opinion, that you need some sulphur and molasses. What's the matter with you today, Judy, anyhow? You look so worried. Are you keeping something from us? Is your grandmother worse? I had a bad dream about her last night, and Blake says he did."

They were a steadying pair, Blake and Betsy. Judy managed a parting smile for them. "Don't fret!" she said. "Grandmother will be home now before we know it!"

She set her soft young chin as she turned the car, toward Bartholomew's. If David Leavens could be so cool and formal after all that had gone before, he just wasn't worth a thought. He was cold and heartless and she hoped never again to see him!

But she wasn't surprised to find that her breath was coming in odd little jumps when she drew up finally outside the hospital. She parked, and sat quite still for a mo-

ment, gazing up at it. There was a sliver of a new moon resting on the tip of the topmost tower. The sky, just darkening, was pale amythest and rose.

In that building, she thought as a surge of hope swept through her, were the two people she loved most in all the world.

"I can't help it!" she choked, her slim hands clenched. "I love him! I never loved anybody like this before. I never will again! It's like coming home, to be here. It has been, from the first. I haven't been afraid for Grandmother, ever, because David was taking care of things."

She got out slowly and went up the familiar steps and in through the crowded waiting-room, with its sea of solemn faces.

Outside the little Chapel she paused for a moment, breathless. Once or twice in the past week she had gone in. Beyond the great oaken door with the iron hinges there was a lovely quietness, and peace. A stained-glass window and candles burning on the altar. Little niches, with velvet pillows beneath them, where people went to pray.

But Rachel didn't need praying for, not now. Judy turned away, her bright face solemn. Rachel was doing all right, hadn't David said? They were waiting for her up there, and they would all joke together like usual!

"Don't know why I pay any attention to you!" Rachel would snort. But her eyes would twinkle wickedly at David. "You young doctors think you know it all!"

And David would say, "Don't talk back, lady!"

"It didn't happen last night!" Judy told herself, violently. "It was just a bad dream! Except the part where he said dreams come true. Oh, David, David!"

She turned a corner, hope suddenly high in her heart.

Then, incredibly, it happened. Never afterward would she trust the joyful premonitions in her heart. Because there, in the deserted corridor, stood David and Megan, the nurse.

They thought they were alone. They didn't hear her coming. And before Judy could turn and rush away, she heard the flood of words, whispered in Megan's hysterical voice.

"Stop it! Oh, David, stop it! You've got to stop treating me like a child! I'm not a child and you know it! I'm eighteen. And I can't stand it! I hate all this!" Her voice broke. "I've been doing it only because you wanted me to. I've loathed it from the beginning. Sickness, suffering—death! I never wanted to be a nurse! I've just wanted to be young and have fun and life and laughter. All I've ever wanted was to be near you! From the time I was old enough to think, that's all I've ever wanted. But you—"

"Megan!" There was an agonized note to David's voice.

Judy, rooted to the spot, heard it, her heart stopping. She saw him bend his tall head to the girl's. Gripping her slender arm, he said, "Megan, sweet! Pull yourself together. "You're just worn out. I am, too. The past half-hour has been tough. It's no joke to loose a patient. But you can't let yourself go to pieces like this. Go get some rest. I'll explain things to the supervisor for you."

Judy waited to hear no more. Blindly, she turned and went back along the corridor, through the waiting-room and out. She searched for the car and found it. She opened the door and stumbled in, thinking, This isn't happening! I won't believe it.

But as she backed the car around and drove along the familiar city streets, automatically obeying traffic rules and regulations, she knew that it was true. Old Sam had been right. David Leavens was really involved with another girl; it wasn't just idle gossip. But what had last night meant to him?

"Just harmless fun!" she told herself, her young face white and stricken. "He was amusing himself, I guess. Playing a game. Only he thought I would understand. Because I'm the kind of girl whose heart could be guaranteed not to break. Oh, David, David!"

SHE HAD no idea how far she drove. She forgot Rachel, everything, and drove on and on, her mind blank and empty. She hit sixty, often, but her hands were firm and steady on the wheel.

She stopped at a diner, somewhere along the way, and went in and got a cup of coffee.

"A sandwich, too, miss? Doughnut?"

"No thank you. I'm not hungry."

Then she was in the car again. It was silly, of course, to run away like this. But

nobody would miss her. Rachel was doubtless sleeping, just as usual. And David—

She shut her mind again. But as the moon slipped up the arch of the purple sky and began its descent she found herself, at last, turning up the Hill toward the aristocratic old house. A clock across the city somewhere, incredibly, struck ten.

But it can't be! she thought. And suddenly, to her amazement, she saw that the house was brightly lighted, shining like a Christmas tree. By the curb, too, several cars were parked.

She got out and saw that one of them was a cream-colored convertible. It could belong to only one person she knew—Rufus Gordon. But what could Rufus be doing here, as late as his? Was anything wrong?

The door opened and against the hall light Rufus stood. He came down the steps and said, in an odd voice, "I was just leaving, Judy. But I'm glad you've finally shown up. They've been worried about you. Where were you?"

She stared at him. But before she could answer he took her arm and said, "Don't say it! I'm sorry about last night, sweet. I came over to apologize. I stuck around to see if I could be of any use. Forgive me?"

"Of course." She looked at him. She had known Rufus for years. No matter what he did he always came back, penitent and devoted. They were two of a kind. His world was her world, the life she had been born to. She had been a fool to think she could share a life of service and sacrifice with David.

She tried not to stiffen when his arm went around her and he bent his lips to hers. She would forget David after a while she reminded herself frantically.

She looked up then and saw Brent and Betsy and Blake in the doorway. Betsy had been crying. Brent said, "There's been no change, Judy, for the past two hours. It's useless to wait around Bartholomew's."

She knew then, of course. It was Rachel. That was what David had meant when he said to Megan, "It's no joke to lose a fight." Rachel had been dying then, needing her, maybe, while she had rushed off, concerned only with her own personal grief.

Afterward she never knew exactly how she got back to Bartholomew's. She didn't cry. The Witherells never cried. "Tears," Rachel had always declared, "are a sign of weakness, Judith. Take your blows with your chin up, always!"

Her chin was up when she met David, outside old Rachel's door. He came out very quietly. He said, "Hello, Judy." His voice was calm and matter-of-fact.

"How is she?" She managed the words through lips that were white and stiff.

"She's resting," he said, and his face looked drawn and weary. But his eyes met hers and in them the white fire blazed. He took her arm and his grip was firm and steadying.

He said, walking her along the corridor, "I expected you'd show up, at last. I missed you, tonight, Judy. But go on home now. You can't do any good. She's had a bad attack, but I think we've got it licked, this time." He sighed. "We've done all we could, anyhow. You can trust me to take good care of things, can't you?"

"Yes." She found her voice. Of course she could trust him! It didn't matter, for the moment, that he wasn't in love with her after all. He was standing by, and Rachel was still living. He had managed a small miracle, or so it seemed to her.

She said, in a small voice, "Thank you, David!" But as she turned away, his voice stopped her.

"Sleep well, Judy!" he said. "And dream sweet, too!" he added, impulsively. "Remember last night and what we decided? Dreams do sometimes come true. Don't forget that, will you?"

"No. I won't forget! she said.

She didn't know what he meant. But suddenly it didn't matter that she had seen him with Megan. If he were in love with another girl would he look so eager and tender, so loathe to let her go?

"I don't know and I don't care!" Judy told herself. "I can't think any more tonight! I'm too exhausted!

IT WAS early the next morning, when she turned the car in at Bartholomew's again. She hadn't stopped to telephone. That was futile. She had some forsythia for Rachel, and hope was high in her heart. She went up the steps and in and Sam was waiting in the elevator for her. His cold was better. He smiled and said, "Nobody's up yet, but you and me, I guess, Miss Witherell. And Doctor Leavens. He never goes to bed! He's been pretty worried about

your grandmother, but she's better today."

"Oh!" She swallowed hard. "I knew she would be, Sam!" she said. "Nothing could happen to her, with Doctor Leavens in charge. But I had to come."

"Of course you couldn't!" Sam cleared his throat. "By the way. Miss Judy, I'm sorry I said what I did the other night. That foolish gossip. I was right, though. It didn't mean a thing. Megan Thurston quit her job here last night."

A little blankly Judy stared as the elevator disappeared. Dear, funny old Sam. If he thought he was making sense he was crazy! But perhaps he did know what he was talking about.

She went along the corridor, her pulses throbbing. Outside her grandmother's door she paused. Hilda, still on duty, beckoned to her. Very softly, she tiptoed in. Rachel's eyes were closed.

"Good morning!" Rachel whispered. "Up with the birds, aren't you, Judith?" She opened her eyes and grinned. "Knew it was you!" she said. "Could smell that perfume. Devastating stuff. You wear it for David, don't you?"

"Oh, darling!" Judy's voice was just a breath.

"He thought I was done for last night but I fooled him! You can't kill a Witherell!" Rachel said. "I'm good for a long time yet, don't worry!" She sighed and closed her eyes. "But go along now and get your breakfast. I'm sleepy. Tell David I'm fit as a fiddle. Tell him—"

"Shush!" Hilda said. Gently she smoothed the covers. She moved toward the door then with Judy. She said, eyes shining, "She's a wonder, Judy. She's okay now. Until the next time! Doctor Leavens pulled her through. It was her faith in him as much as anything, maybe. I don't know. Faith does work miracles sometimes. But I do know I've never seen him so upset. He's in the office now."

"I know! I will, Hilda. And thanks to you, too!"

Was it only two days ago that she had stood here, she wondered, as she paused, breathless, by the office door. It seemed like a lifetime ago. But suddenly David looked up and stopped thinking.

David, his blue eyes alight, exclaimed, "Did you come on a magic carpet?"

"No, I came on wings!" she said.

A silly way to talk but suddenly she felt gay and silly. It was always so, when she was with him. "I came to say thank you again, David. I've just seen Grandmother and she's fine and Hilda told me you were here. I wanted you to know that I didn't neglect her last night. After meeting Rufus you might think anything."

"But I don't—"

"No, please don't stop me! Let me finish. I did come, and—went away again. Because you see, I couldn't get by you, David—without your knowing that I overheard you and Megan. I shouldn't tell you, should I?" She caught her breath.

"Judy, look!" He towered over her. "Whatever you heard doesn't matter! Not to Megan—not really. And certainly not to me. Megan was worked up, on the verge of hysterics. She had just seen her first death and that's always grim. She's not cut out for the work and she knows it. I know it now, too."

He sighed. "It doesn't make sense to you, yet, does it, darling? I can see by your face. But it's really very simple. Megan's parents are mine, too. The foster parents I told you about. They're the finest people in the world. It was their home where we went the other night, before dinner. You can see now that it was a struggle for them to have me as an added burden from the time I was six! There were five of us, and then Megan came along, ten years behind me. She's only eighteen now. She's always had a kind of romantic idea about me."

"I know," Judy said softly.

"But she'll outgrow it. And it's unimportant. So whatever you heard, forget it. Forgive me for the way I acted the other night! It was just that I was more than a little tired. When a man's tired he can be a bore! But you suddenly seemed so unattainable. And you still do, damn it! Oh, for heaven's sake, Judy, must I go on talking? Do you care about all this?"

"Not much!" She lifted her face to his. "So don't go on, darling. Just kiss me, instead. Because I love you, too."

The rest was crushed against his lips. Straining her close, he kissed her there in the quiet office, just at sunrise, and all the strain and sadness miraculously left her heart. It was spring, and they were together. Dreams did come true.

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LOVE SHORT STORIES

(Continued from page 49)

L-3450 CURLY HAIR
Come on, girls, write to this young man of twenty-three. He has blond curly hair, is five feet, six inches tall. He enjoys all sports especially skating and swimming. He promises to answer all letters promptly.
Curly

L-3451 POPULAR GIRL
I am another girl looking for pen pals. I have long dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and stand five feet, one inch tall. I am sixteen years old and a junior in high school. I try to have lots of friends. I am secretary of my class at school and love it.
Evie

L-3452 AMATEUR MOVIES
I have just returned from the service and am now working in a musical instrument factory. My hobby is making amateur moving pictures. I am twenty-six years old, of medium build, and stand five feet, eleven inches tall. Fill my box with letters.
Del

L-3453 KEEP HER BUSY
Here's a call to guys and gals all over the world to fill the mailbox of a girl from a large state. She just left college and is living in a new city. She is a brunette, twenty-one years of age and interested in everything from art to softball.
Jeanie

L-3454 LIKES MUSIC
I enjoy listening to both popular and classical music. I am a girl of sixteen and have blonde hair and greenish-blue eyes. I am a junior in high school and love to dance and participate in all outdoor sports. I would like to hear from boys and girls all over the United States.
Chris

L-3455 HARD WORKER
I am interested in writing to a few friends. I am thirty-eight years old, single, and I own and operate a gasoline station. I love to dance and go to the movies. I work very long hours and don't have much time for hobbies.
Gordon

L-3456 GOOD MARKSMAN
I have a fascination for guns and am considered a good shot with a twenty-two rifle. I play the piano for club parties. I am a girl of fourteen years, five feet, nine inches tall, with light brown hair and eyes. I would really like some pen pals.
Toni

L-3457 SHOE SALESMAN
I enjoy letter writing as a pastime. I also like fishing, horseback riding, baseball, fencing, boating, and music. I am a twenty-two year old fellow, five feet, eleven inches tall, have sandy brown hair and gray-blue eyes. I am a shoe salesman with lots of time to spare.
Horace

L-3458 TRAVELERS WANTED
I am a neat, quiet type of woman of forty-one, five feet, seven inches tall, with blue eye. I weigh one hundred forty pounds. I like good music, movies and walking. I would like to correspond with folks my age who have traveled a bit.
Faith

L-3459 RADIO DREAMER
I am a girl of seventeen who would like some new pals. I am fond of all sports although roller skating and bike riding are my favorites. I love to sing and play the piano accordion. My pet ambition is to go on the radio. My hair and eyes are brown.
Ginger

L-3460 SUNNY DISPOSITION
Five feet, three inches tall, with black hair and dark brown eyes, I am twenty-three years old. My favorite pastimes are movies and music. I am crazy about the latest Hit Parade songs and popular bands. I like to wear a smile and have fun.
Sherry

PEN PALS

L-3461 CITY GIRL
I may be described as having light brown hair, blue eyes, a pug nose and freckles. I am a fifteen year old girl and a sophmore in high school. I like reading best, and dogs and horses. I bike ride and roller skate. I live in the city but I prefer the country.
Miss Fury

L-3462 LONELY LASS
A lonely lass of twenty-four wants friends born around the same time as she. She is five feet, five inches tall, has reddish brown hair and green eyes. Her hobbies are learning to bowl, dancing and wearing smart clothes. She dabbles in astrology and tells the fortunes of all who write, but enclose your birthday.
Holly

L-3463 FROM A TO Z
I have much time on my hand for correspondence. I am a fellow interested in almost anything, from science, art, sports, opera and jazz music. It would be interesting to hear from anyone from anyplace in the world.
Henry

L-3464 GUITARIST
Playing the guitar, singing and skating are my hobbies. I am a stenographer, twenty years old, stand five feet, three inches tall, and fair complected. I like my work very much. I would like to exchange ideas with pen pals.
Blue Eyes
5c postage

L-3465 VERSATILE
I simply love Vaughn Monroe. I am fourteen, and I like to sing with my brother and his friends. I go to the movies quite a bit and also enjoy roller skating and dancing, especially to South American music. I will enjoy letters from both boys and girls.
Joan

L-3466 HARRY JAMES FAN
I am a girl of twenty-one years and have dark blond hair and blue eyes. I live in a very small town. I skate in the winter and swim and boat in the summer. My hobbies are roller skating and most of all, dancing. I would enjoy having pen pals between the ages of twenty to twenty-five.
Don

L-3467 AVID READER
My ambition is to become a singer. I am fourteen years old and have brown hair and eyes. My hobbies are writing letters and reading all kinds of magazines. My school work is fine. I hope I receive many letters so that I can answer them.
Cookie

L-3468 HARD WORKER
My work keeps me at jagged ends as I have to work on various shifts. The time breaks up the day and evening and doesn't give me much chance for social life. I am twenty years old, with blonde hair and blue eyes. I am five feet, ten inches tall. My hobbies are taking pictures and hiking.
Bee

L-3469 COLLEGE GRAD
I am twenty-five years of age and work in a very large medical institution. I have dark blond hair and blue eyes, and stand five feet, eleven inches tall. I enjoy good music, swimming and long hikes. I read novels and modern verse. I would like to hear from people around my age.
Ken

L-3470 SENTIMENTAL
I like most all kinds of sports, writing letters, reading, music and the movies. I collect bits of sentimental verse. I'm crazy about the latest hit songs. I stand five feet, three inches, and have dark brown eyes and black hair. I am twenty-two.
Sherry

L-3471 SPORTS STORIES
Is there anyone interested in writing to a sixteen-year-old Canadian boy? His hair is light brown,

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his eyes are hazel. He stands five feet, six inches. His hobby is collecting sports stories for his scrapbook. His ambition is to join the Naval Air Corps.

Ricky
(5c postage)

L-3472 FOND OF HORSES
I live in the country with no neighbors close by and I have very few friends, so I am lonely. I am thirty-eight years old, with dark hair and eyes. My hobby is crocheting, reading, listening to the radio. I am very fond of horses. I would like to hear from anyone my age.

Stella

L-3473 EDUCATION MINDED
Serious minded, intelligent people are those I would like to hear from. I am not a dead-beat but education is all that occupies my mind. I am seventeen. I like to go to football games, enjoy bicycle riding and like to hike and fish.

Betts

L-3474 ANXIOUS LADDIE
I am a lad of seventeen, five feet, eleven inches tall. I love dancing and swimming best of all. Also, I like baseball and basketball, I play a saxophone in the school band. So come on, all you chicks, write to me and I promise an answer.

Slim

L-3475 TRAINED NURSE
I am a recently graduated nurse who is practicing away from home. I am five feet, two inches tall, with dark hair and blue eyes. I enjoy swimming, walking, dancing, reading and writing letters. I'm twenty-one years old. I would like to hear from both fellows and girls.

Vi

L-3476 THRILLING EXPERIENCES
At present, I am engaged in aeronautical communication work up here in Labrador. Since I have been doing this work, I have traveled a great deal and have many thrilling stories to tell. I am twenty-one, stand five feet, ten inches, and have blond hair and blue eyes.

Lou
(5c postage)

L-3477 MENTAL TELEPATHIST
Who will write to a lonesome girl of twenty-seven, with brown hair and eyes. My hobbies are collecting post cards, souvenirs, salt and pepper shakers, collecting poetry, and reading. My friends and I try the theory of mental telepathy on each other.

Julia

L-3478 DIMPLES
I have ash-blonde hair and dimples. My hobbies are dancing, sports, journalism, and having a swell time. I am five feet, five inches tall. Pen pals will be friends to me just as my close pals are. I will answer all letters.

Margie
(5c postage)

L-3479 ARDENT COLLECTOR
My favorite pastimes are embroidery, crocheting, reading good books, and writing letters. I am also an ardent stamp collector. I am a young lady of twenty-five years. I would like to hear from all, especially foreign pals.

Ben
(5c postage)

L-3480 BORED AND LONELY
I'm a bored and lonely ex-GI. I would like to make some new friends. I'm five feet, eleven inches tall, with brown hair and blue eyes. I like swimming, reading, music and the theatre. I would gladly receive letters from people all over the world.

Chet

L-3481 IN DRUM CORPS
Hello pals! I would like to hear from all of you. I am sixteen, have light brown hair and brown

eyes. I love sports, but most of all, I like to sing, play piano and twirl the baton in the drum corps. My main interest is to receive your letters.

Milly

L-3482 ENJOYS TRAVEL

I am interested in hearing from people who enjoy travel and photography. My side interest is gardening and my reading in the spring includes the seed catalogue. I am thirty-four years old, with brown hair and eyes. May I hear from those with similar interests.

Eddie

L-3483 BASKS IN THE SUN

I am an eighteen-year-old girl from South Africa who would like to have pen friends in the United States. I am slender, stand five feet, nine inches tall, and have chestnut hair and hazel eyes. I am fond of dancing, movies, crime detection, and basking in the sun.

Lucky
(5c postage)

L-3484 COLLEGE BOY

I find myself in a lonely little town with very little to do. I hope to become an electrical engineer, and at present, am going to college. I am twenty-three, and love to dance, swim, and hunt. My hobby is letter writing, so send some letters my way.

Doc

L-3485 NO RECORD BREAKER

I am a girl of seventeen, have nut-brown hair and hazel eyes. I'm keen on swimming but am no record breaker. I love dancing and music, and am fond of any kind of animal. I work in a newspaper office and love it. I can describe many interesting places.

Hazel Eyes
(5c postage)

L-3486 INTERESTING BACKGROUND

Here is an eighteen-year-old girl who works as a secretary in a real-estate office. Her ambition is to become a real-estate broker. She stands five feet, three, and has dark hair and eyes. She likes music from Bach to Boogie Woogie, dancing and reading.

Gypsy

L-3487 WIDOWER

I am a widower, thirty-eight years old, stand five feet, five inches, and have dark brown hair and blue eyes. I am a textile weaver in a small city. My favorite pastimes are fishing, dancing, and going to the movies. I would like to hear from people my age.

Tim

L-3488 HAS TWO JOBS

I am a sixteen-year-old girl standing five feet, two inches tall. My hair is black, my eyes are pale blue and my complexion is fair. I like all kinds of outdoor sports and am very fond of dancing and music. I am a waitress and also work as a telephone operator.

Toots

L-3489 A TWIN

I am a twin but since my sister married, I am quite lonely. I am twenty-one years old, have blue eyes, light brown hair, and am five feet, three inches tall. I collect photos of movie stars and friends. I love to go dancing which I do often.

Kit

L-3490 LAWYER TO BE

Here is a young man of sixteen who has blond curly hair and blue eyes. His ambition is to become a lawyer. He likes all kind of sports and is always willing to learn more about them. He has studied the violin, piano and guitar. He collects stamps and does a little taxidermy.

Peanut

L-3491 FILL HER MAILBOX

I am a girl twenty-two years old with brown hair and hazel eyes. I am about five feet, six inches in height. Outside of the movies and occasional dancing, I am fond of bowling, reading, sewing, cooking, and crocheting. So come on, keep my mailman busy.

Norma

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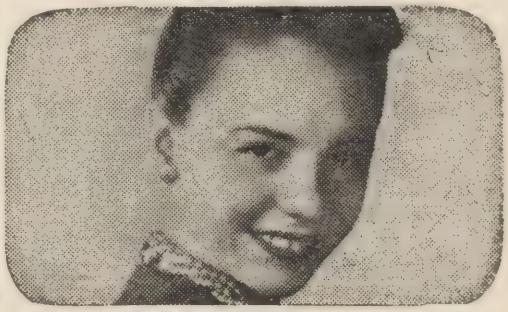

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LOVE SHORT STORIES

L-3492 RATHER SHY
Here is a lonely southern girl, hunting for some pals. She is twenty-one, five feet, four inches, with black hair and brown eyes. She listens to the radio, reads, and sews. She tries to sing a little, and dance, and she likes outdoor sports. She is rather shy, but she likes people.
Mary

L-3493 FOUR YEARS OF SERVICE
I am a young man of twenty-three who would like very much to make some new friends. I am five feet, eight inches tall, with brown hair and brown eyes. I am at present attending radio and television school. I promise to answer all letters on the double.
Billy

L-3494 LIKES TO TINKER
I have opened a magazine and stationery store. I am thirty years old, five feet, five inches tall, with dark blond hair and blue eyes. I have a good sense of humor and even disposition. I love most sports. I like tinkering with odds and ends. I am fond of dancing too.
Walter

L-3495 HANDICAPPED
I am a handicapped widow of fifty-five years. I like to watch people dance, skate, and participate in outdoor sports. I do some fancy work, reading, and I like good shows. I like to write letters very much and would like to receive many so that I can keep busy.
Happy

L-3496 WRITE A MOTHER
Here is a young mother twenty-seven years who is kept quite busy with her three children. But after they are tucked into bed, the nights are lonesome. She could think of nothing nicer than to correspond with other mothers. Let's go, pals.
Viv

L-3497 ANYTHING FOR FUN
Although I have many friends I would like to make new ones. I am a high school senior with brown hair and gray-green eyes. My favorite pastimes are dancing, reading, writing letters, and taking in all kinds of sports. Anything for fun is my motto.
Dale

L-3498 SERIOUS MAN
I am a very lonesome young man, thirty-two years old, with brown hair and green eyes. I am of the serious type and would like to hear from ladies my age who are serious. I like to travel. I love horses and dogs. I stand five feet, eight inches tall.
Lonesome

L-3499 MACHINIST
I am back at my old job after three years in the Canadian Navy. I am twenty-one, with blue eyes, and light brown hair. I like to spend my time skating, dancing, swimming, playing football, and collecting snapshots.
Mickey
(5c postage)

L-3500 TRUE PAL
Like a true pen pal? Sixteen years old, with brown hair and deep brown eyes just about describes me. I like dogs and horses. My hobbies are many: driving a car, going to the movies, drawing, singing cowboy songs, and reading good books. How about dropping a line?
Betty

L-3501 ENGLISH MAIDEN
I am very interested in domestic work, home life, music and swimming. I am thirty-one years old, have dark brown eyes and black hair. I am rather short and slightly built. I would love to hear from people all over the United States and I will tell them about South Africa.
Hopeful
(5c postage)

L-3502 AMBITIOUS
I am twenty-two years old, five feet, eight inches tall, have blue eyes and brown curly hair. I like sports, especially football and basketball. I plan to enter college in the fall to study physical education. I play the piano well and like to draw.
Calvin

(Continued from page 38)

over I came back to Caracas and sent for Jack. He'd been a paratrooper and I thought the change of atmosphere here would do him good."

He stopped as if searching for the right words, and Barbara raised eyes that were dark with understanding. "So that's why you made me so unwelcome at White Cloud," she murmured brokenly. "Why even Mrs. Carson didn't trust me."

He nodded contritely. "Yes. We were both afraid you'd hurt Jack the way I'd been hurt. I guess our minds were twisted because of what had already happened to me. But that day when Jack suggested I take you to Seven Bells, I couldn't resist any more. I knew I had to have those few hours to remember for always. Afterward, I hated myself for my weakness."

His hands dug into her flesh in their urgency. "But, Barbara, I know now that I was so miserably wrong. That you are good and sweet and true and everything else that is fine in a woman. That you haven't a selfish hair in your head or you wouldn't have turned down your career just to help those poor kids at the orphanage. My beloved, can you ever forgive and forget what a stupid, blind idiot I've been. Can you find enough room in that heart of yours to give me a second chance?"

His lips boldly seeked hers. They were incredibly sweet and tender against her mouth, pleading forgiveness. Barbara's eyes closed dreamily.

This was it, she thought exultantly. It was an enchanting miraculous world and it was bound by the possessive circle of Val's arms.

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Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

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It's the season of romance, and Popular Publications heeds Cupid's calendar by bringing you your favorite authors and the best in love fiction—in not one, but *seven* top-flight magazines.

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ALL STORY LOVE
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DOUBLE FOR HEARTBREAK

(Continued from page 22)

Beth felt no elation even though she was sure it was Chan who had broken the engagement. It wasn't until several days later when she picked up a newspaper and saw a picture of him alighting from a plane at La Guardia Field that her heart began to race wildly. She read the interview he gave, feeling that every word was directed straight at her. It was extremely short and terse.

"I have no future plans until I take care of some unfinished business. I will be at the Waldorf Astoria, indefinitely. I would like to hear from my friends." That was all he had to say.

Beth seized the phone book and looked up the number of the Waldorf, not daring to let her mind dictate to her heart. She was a friend. She could say hello, at least, couldn't she?

She waited breathlessly to be connected with Chan's suite. When she heard his voice at last, panic seized her. She stammered:

"Hello, Chan, this is—" She stopped, unable to finish.

"I know who it is," Chan said warmly. "Oh, Beth, where are you?"

Beth gave him the address and Chan said happily, "I'll be right over, Beth. I was hoping you'd read the papers and call me. I hadn't the faintest idea where to look for you but I meant to find you if it took forever!" His voice lowered, "I love you, darling. I've loved you longer than you'll ever know. But what I had to offer you wasn't good enough. If you'll just give me a chance now I'll—"

"If you'll just hang up and come over," Beth pleaded.

"I'm on my way," he said and the phone clicked in Beth's ears.

She flew around crazily getting dressed. He was already in the lobby waiting for her when she got downstairs.

Beth went into his arms like a homing pigeon and stayed there for a long time. Curious stares and comments of the people around didn't bother them at all. They were together again—never to part! That was the only important thing.

♥ ♥ ♥

a beam of hope lighting the way across the deadly path of cancer

One out of three may be saved from a cancer death through early diagnosis and prompt effective treatment.

Science is armed with X-ray, radium and surgery to defeat this deadly killer—but you MUST help yourself.

30 to 50% of cancer's victims might be saved if we recognized cancer's danger signals.

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES

See your doctor at least once a year.

Be alert to cancer's danger signals: 1. Any sore that does not heal, particularly about the tongue, mouth or lips; 2. A painless lump or thickening, especially in the breast, lip or tongue; 3. Progressive change in the color or size of a wart or mole; 4. Persistent indigestion; 5. Persistent hoarseness, unexplained cough, or difficulty in swallowing; 6. Bloody discharge from the nipple or irregular bleeding from any of the natural body openings; 7. Any radical change in normal bowel habits.

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Yes, One in Three may be saved!

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47 Beaver Street, New York 4, N. Y.

Sirs:

☐ I enclose $..... as my gift to fight cancer.

☐ Please send me, without cost, information on the "danger signals" of cancer, to protect myself and my family against cancer.

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